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THE
SCARLET
PIMPERNEL

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Her Majesty's Well Beloved
The First Sir Percy
Nicolette: A Tale of Old Provence

THE
SCARLET PIMPERNEL

FOUR COMPLETE NOVELS
IN ONE VOLUME

BY

BARONESS ORCZY

, Emm
baronness, 1865-

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I WILL REPAY
ELDORADO
SIR PERCY HITS BACK

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FIRST NOVEL

"WE SEEK HIM HERE, WE SEEK HIM THERE"

I

PARIS: SEPTEMBER, 1792

A SURGING, seething, murmuring crowd, of beings that are human only in name, for to the eye and ear they seem naught but savage creatures, animated by vile passions and by the lust of vengeance and of hate. The hour, some little time before sunset, and the place, the West Barricade, at the very spot where, a decade later, a proud tyrant raised an undying monument to the nation's glory and his own vanity.

During the greater part of the day the guillotine had been kept busy at its ghastly work: all that France had boasted of in the past centuries, of ancient names, and blue blood, had paid toll to her desire for liberty and for fraternity. The carnage had only ceased at this late hour of the day because there were other more interesting sights for the people to witness, a little while before the final closing of the barricades for the night.

And so the crowd rushed away from the Place de la Grève and made for the various barricades in order to watch this interesting and amusing sight.

It was to be seen every day, for those aristos were such fools! They were traitors to the people, of course, all of them, men, women, and children who happened to be descendants of the great men who since the Crusades had made the glory of France: her old *noblesse*. Their ancestors had oppressed the people, had crushed them under the scarlet heels of their dainty buckled shoes, and now the people had become the rulers of France and crushed their former masters—not beneath their heel, for they went shoeless mostly in these days—but beneath a more effectual weight, the knife of the guillotine.

And daily, hourly, the hideous instrument of torture claimed its many victims—old men, young women, tiny children, even until the day when it would finally demand the head of a King and of a beautiful young Queen.

But this was as it should be: were not the people now the rulers of France? Every aristocrat was a traitor, as his ancestors had been before him: for two hundred years now the people had sweated, and toiled and starved, to keep a lustful court in lavish extravagance; now the descendants of those who had helped to make those courts brilliant had to hide for their lives—to fly, if they wished to avoid the tardy vengeance of the people.

And they did try to hide, and tried to fly: that was just the fun of the whole thing. Every afternoon before the gates closed and the market carts went out in procession by the various barricades, some fool of an aristo endeavoured to evade the clutches of the Committee of Public Safety. In various disguises, under various pretexts, they tried to slip through the barriers which were so well guarded by citizen soldiers of the Republic. Men in women's clothes, women in male attire, children disguised in beggar's rags: there were some of all sorts: *ci-devant* counts, marquises, even dukes, who wanted to fly from France, reach England, or some other equally accursed country, and there try to rouse foreign feeling against the glorious Revolution, or to raise an army in order to liberate the wretched prisoners in the Temple, who had once called themselves sovereigns of France.

But they were nearly always caught at the barricades. Sergeant Bibot especially at the West Gate had a wonderful nose for scenting an aristo in the most perfect disguise. Then, of course, the fun began. Bibot would look at his prey as a cat looks upon the mouse, play with him, sometimes for quite a quarter of an hour, pretend to be hoodwinked by the disguise, by the wigs and other bits of theatrical make-up which hid the identity of a *ci-devant* noble marquise or count.

Oh! Bibot had a keen sense of humour, and it was well worth hanging round that West Barricade, in order to see him catch an aristo in the very act of trying to flee from the vengeance of the people.

Sometimes Bibot would let his prey actually out by the gates, allowing him to think for the space of two minutes at least that he really had escaped out of Paris, and might even manage to reach the coast of England in safety: but Bibot would let the unfortunate wretch walk about ten mètres towards the open country, then he would send two men after him and bring him back stripped of his disguise.

Oh! that was extremely funny, for as often as not the fugitive would prove to be a woman, some proud marchioness, who looked terribly comical when she found herself in Bibot's clutches after all, and knew that a summary trial would await her the next day, and after that the fond embrace of Madame la Guillotine.

No wonder that on this fine afternoon in September the crowd round Bibot's gate was eager and excited. The lust of blood grows with its satisfaction, there is no satiety: the crowd had seen a hundred noble heads fall beneath the guillotine to-day, it wanted to make sure that it would see another hundred fall on the morrow.

Bibot was sitting on an overturned and empty cask close by the gate of the barricade; a small detachment of citoyen soldiers were under his command. The work had been very hot lately. Those cursed aristos were becoming terrified and tried their hardest to slip out of Paris: men, women and children, whose ancestors, even in remote ages, had served those traitorous Bourbons, were all traitors themselves and right food for the guillotine. Every day Bibot had had the satisfaction of unmasking some fugitive royalists and sending them back to be tried by the Committee of Public Safety, presided over by that good patriot, Citoyen Foucquier Tinville.

Robespierre and Danton both had commended Bibot for his zeal, and Bibot was proud of the fact that he on his own initiative had sent at least fifty aristos to the guillotine.

But to-day all the sergeants in command at the various barricades had had special orders. Recently a very great number of aristos had succeeded in escaping out of France and in reaching England safely. There were curious rumours about these escapes; they had become very frequent and singularly daring; the people's minds were coming strangely excited about it all. Sergeant Grospierre had been sent to the guillotine for allowing a whole family of aristos to slip out of the North Gate under his very nose.

It was asserted that these escapes were organized by a band of Englishmen, whose daring seemed to be unparalleled and who, from sheer desire to meddle in what did not concern them, spent their spare time in snatching away lawful victims destined for Madame la Guillotine. These rumours soon grew in extravagance; there was no doubt that this band of meddlesome Englishmen did exist; moreover, they seemed to be under the leadership of a man whose pluck and audacity were almost fabulous. Strange stories were afloat of how he and those aristos whom he rescued became suddenly invisible as they reached the barricades, and escaped out of the gates by sheer supernatural agency.

No one had seen these mysterious Englishmen; as for their leader, he was never spoken of, save with a superstitious shudder. Citoyen Foucquier Tinville would in the course of the day receive a scrap of paper from some mysterious source; sometimes he would find it in the pocket of his coat, at others it would be handed to him by some one in the crowd, whilst he was on his way to the sitting of the Committee of Public Safety. The paper always contained a brief notice that the band of meddlesome Englishmen were at work, and it was always signed with a device drawn in red—a little star-shaped flower, which we in England call the Scarlet Pimpernel. Within a few hours of the receipt of this impudent notice, the citoyens of the Committee of Public Safety would hear that so many royalists and aristocrats had succeeded in reaching the coast, and were on their way to England and safety.

The guards at the gates had been doubled, the sergeants in command had been threatened with death, whilst liberal rewards were offered for the capture of these daring and impudent Englishmen. There was a sum of five thousand francs promised to the man who laid hands on the mysterious and elusive Scarlet Pimpernel.

Every one felt that Bibot would be that man, and Bibot allowed that belief to take firm root in everybody's mind; and so, day after day, people came to watch him at the West Gate, so as to be present when he laid hands on any fugitive aristo who perhaps might be accompanied by that mysterious Englishman.

"Bah!" he said to his trusted corporal, "Citoyen

Grospierre was a fool! Had it been me now, at that North Gate last week. . . ."

Citoyen Bibot spat on the ground to express his contempt for his comrade's stupidity.

"How did it happen, citoyen?" asked the corporal.

"Grospierre was at the gate, keeping good watch," began Bibot, pompously, as the crowd closed in round him, listening eagerly to his narrative. "We've all heard of this meddlesome Englishman, this accursed Scarlet Pimpernel. He won't get through *my gate*, morbleu! unless he be the devil himself. But Grospierre was a fool. The market carts were going through the gates; there was one laden with casks, and driven by an old man, with a boy beside him. Grospierre was a bit drunk, but he thought himself very clever; he looked into the casks—most of them, at least—and saw they were empty, and let the cart go through."

A murmur of wrath and contempt went round the group of ill-clad wretches who crowded round Citoyen Bibot.

"Half an hour later," continued the sergeant, "up comes a captain of the guard with a squad of some dozen soldiers with him. 'Has a cart gone through?' he asks of Grospierre, breathlessly. 'Yes,' says Grospierre, 'not half an hour ago.' 'And you have let them escape,' shouts the captain furiously. 'You'll go to the guillotine for this, citoyen sergeant! that cart held concealed the ci-devant Duc de Chalis and all his family!' 'What!' thunders Grospierre, aghast. 'Aye! and the driver was none other than that cursed Englishman, the Scarlet Pimpernel.' "

A howl of execration greeted this tale. Citoyen Grospierre had paid for his blunder on the guillotine, but what a fool! oh! what a fool!

Bibot was laughing so much at his own tale that it was some time before he could continue.

"'After them, my men,' shouts the captain," he said, after a while, "'remember the reward; after them, they cannot have gone far!' And with that he rushes through the gate, followed by his dozen soldiers."

"But it was too late!" shouted the crowd, excitedly.

"They never got them!"

"Curse that Grospierre for his folly."

"He deserved his fate!"

"Fancy not examining those casks properly!"

But these sallies seemed to amuse Citoyen Bibot exceedingly; he laughed until his sides ached, and the tears streamed down his cheeks.

"Nay, nay!" he said at last, "those aristos weren't in the cart; the driver was not the Scarlet Pimpernel!"

"What?"

"No! The captain of the guard was that damned Englishman in disguise, and every one of his soldiers aristos!"

The crowd this time said nothing: the story certainly savoured of the supernatural, and though the Republic had abolished God, it had not quite succeeded in killing the fear of the supernatural in the hearts of the people. Truly that Englishman must be the devil himself.

The sun was sinking low down in the west. Bibot prepared himself to close the gates.

"En avant the carts," he said.

Some dozen covered carts were drawn up in a row, ready to leave town, in order to fetch the produce from the country close by, for market the next morning. They were mostly well known to Bibot, as they went through his gate twice every day on their way to and from the town. He spoke to one or two of their drivers

—mostly women—and was at great pains to examine the inside of the carts.

"You never know," he would say, "and I'm not going to be caught like that fool Grospierre."

The women who drove the carts usually spent their day on the Place de la Grève, beneath the platform of the guillotine, knitting and gossiping, whilst they watched the rows of tumbrils arriving with the victims the Reign of Terror claimed every day. It was great fun to see the aristos arriving for the reception of Madame la Guillotine, and the places close by the platform were very much sought after. Bibot, during the day, had been on duty on the Place. He recognized most of the old hags, "tricotteuses," as they were called, who sat there and knitted whilst head after head fell beneath the knife, and they themselves got quite bespattered with the blood of those cursed aristos.

"Hé; la mère!" said Bibot to one of these horrible hags; "what have you got there?"

He had seen her earlier in the day, with her knitting and the whip of her cart close beside her. Now she had fastened a row of curly locks to the whip handle, all colours, from gold to silver, fair to dark, and she stroked them with her huge, bony fingers as she laughed at Bibot.

"I made friends with Madame Guillotine's lover," she said with a coarse laugh, "he cut these off for me from the heads as they rolled down. He has promised me some more to-morrow, but I don't know if I shall be at my usual place."

"Ah! how is that, la mère?" asked Bibot, who, hardened soldier though he was, could not help shuddering at the awful loathsomeness of this semblence of a woman, with her ghastly trophy on the handle of her whip.

"My grandson has got the small-pox," she said with a jerk of her thumb towards the inside of her cart, "some say it's the plague! If it is, I shan't be allowed to come into Paris to-morrow."

At the first mention of the word small-pox, Bibot had stepped hastily backwards, and when the old hag spoke of the plague, he retreated from her as fast as he could.

"Curse you!" he muttered, whilst the whole crowd hastily avoided the cart, leaving it standing all alone in the midst of the place.

The old hag laughed.

"Curse you, citoyen, for being a coward," she said. "Bah! what a man to be afraid of sickness."

"Morbleu! the plague!"

Every one was awe-struck and silent, filled with horror for the loathsome malady, the one thing which still had the power to arouse terror and disgust in these savage, brutalized creatures.

"Get out with you and with your plague-stricken brood!" shouted Bibot, hoarsely.

And with another rough laugh and coarse jest the old hag whipped up her lean nag and drove her cart out of the gate.

This incident had spoilt the afternoon. The people were terrified of these two horrible curses, the two maladies which nothing could cure, and which were the precursors of an awful and lonely death. They hung about the barricades, silent and sullen for a while, eyeing one another suspiciously, avoiding each other as if by instinct, lest the plague lurked already in their midst. Presently, as in the case of Grospierre, a captain of the guard appeared suddenly. But he was known to Bibot, and there was no fear of his turning out to be a sly Englishman in disguise.

"A cart . . . " he shouted breathlessly, even before he had reached the gates.

"What cart?" asked Bibot, roughly.

"Driven by an old hag. . . . A covered cart. . . ."

"There were a dozen. . . ."

"An old hag who said her son had the plague?"

"Yes. . . ."

"You have not let them go?"

"Morbleu!" said Bibot, whose purple cheeks had suddenly become white with fear.

"The cart contained the ci-devant Comtesse de Tournay and her two children, all of them traitors and condemned to death."

"And their driver?" muttered Bibot, as a superstitious shudder ran down his spine.

"Sacrê tonnerre," said the captain, "but it is feared that it was that accursed Englishman himself—the Scarlet Pimpernel."

2

DOVER: "THE FISHERMAN'S REST"

In the kitchen Sally was extremely busy—saucepans and frying-pans were standing in rows on the gigantic hearth, the huge stock-pot stood in a corner and the jack turned with slow deliberation, and presented alternately to the glow every side of a noble sirloin of beef. The two little kitchen-maids bustled around, eager to help, hot and panting, with cotton sleeves well tucked up above the dimpled elbows, and giggling over some private jokes of their own whenever Miss Sally's back was turned for a moment. And old Jemima, stolid in temper and solid in bulk, kept up a long and subdued grumble, while she stirred the stock-pot methodically over the fire.

"What ho! Sally!" came in cheerful if none too melodious accents from the coffee-room close by.

"Lud bless my soul!" exclaimed Sally, with a good-humoured laugh, "What be they all wanting now, I wonder!"

"Beer, of course," grumbled Jemima, "you don't 'xpect Jimmy Pitkin to 'ave done with one tankard, do ye?"

"Mr. 'Arry, 'e looked uncommon thirsty too," simpered Martha, one of the little kitchen-maids; and her beady black eyes twinkled as they met those of her companion, whereupon both started on a round of short and suppressed giggles.

Sally looked cross for a moment, and thoughtfully rubbed her hands against her shapely hips; her palms were itching, evidently, to come in contact with Martha's rosy cheeks—but inherent good-humour prevailed, and with a pout and a shrug of the shoulders, she turned her attention to the fried potatoes.

"What ho, Sally! hey, Sally!"

And a chorus of pewter mugs, tapped with impatient hands against the oak tables of the coffee-room, accompanied the shouts for mine host's buxom daughter.

"Sally!" shouted a more persistent voice, "are ye goin' to be all night with that there beer?"

"I do think father might get the beer for them," muttered Sally, as Jemima, stolidly and without further comment, took a couple of foam-crowned jugs from the shelf and began filling a number of pewter tankards with some of that home-brewed ale for which *The Fisherman's Rest* had been famous since the days of King Charles. "'E knows 'ow busy we are in 'ere."

"Your father is too busy discussing politics with Mr. 'Empseed to worry 'isself about you and the kitchen," grumbled Jemima under her breath.

Sally had gone to the small mirror which hung in a corner of the kitchen, and was hastily smoothing her hair and setting her frilled cap at its most becoming angle over her dark curls: then she took up the tankards by their handles, three in each strong, brown hand, and laughing, grumbling, blushing, carried them through into the coffee-room.

There, there was certainly no sign of that bustle and activity which kept four women busy and hot in the glowing kitchen beyond.

The coffee-room of *The Fisherman's Rest* is a show place now at the beginning of the twentieth century. At the end of the eighteenth, in the year of grace 1792, it had not yet gained that notoriety and importance which a hundred additional years and the craze of the age have since bestowed upon it. Yet it was an old place, even then, for the oak rafters and beams were already black with age—as were the panelled seats, with their tall backs, and the long polished tables between, on which innumerable pewter tankards had left fantastic patterns of many-sized rings. In the leaded window, high up, a row of pots of scarlet geraniums and blue larkspur gave the bright note of colour against the dull background of the oak.

That Mr. Jellyband, landlord of *The Fisherman's Rest* at Dover, was a prosperous man, was of course clear to the most casual observer. The pewter on the fine old dressers, the brass above the gigantic hearth, shone like gold and silver—the red-tiled floor was as brilliant as the scarlet geranium on the window-sill—this meant that his servants were good and plentiful, that the custom was constant, and of that order which necessitated the keeping up of the coffee-room to a high standard of elegance and order.

As Sally came in, laughing through her frowns, and displaying a row of dazzling white teeth, she was greeted with shouts and chorus of applause.

"Why, here's Sally! What do, Sally! Hurrah for pretty Sally!"

"I thought you'd grown deaf in that kitchen of yours," muttered Jimmy Pitkin, as he passed the back of his hand across his very dry lips.

"All ri'! all ri'!" laughed Sally, as she deposited the freshly-filled tankards upon the tables, "why, what a 'urry, to be sure! And is your gran'mother a-dyin', an' you wantin' to see the pore soul afore she'm gone! I never see'd such a mighty rushin'!"

A chorus of good-humoured laughter greeted this witticism, which gave the company there present food for many jokes for some considerable time. Sally now seemed in less of a hurry to get back to her pots and pans. A young man with fair curly hair, and eager, bright blue eyes, was engaging most of her attention and the whole of her time, whilst broad witticisms anent Jimmy Pitkin's fictitious grandmother flew from mouth to mouth, mixed with heavy puffs of pungent tobacco smoke.

Facing the hearth, his legs wide apart, a long clay pipe in his mouth, stood mine host himself, worthy Mr. Jellyband, landlord of *The Fisherman's Rest*, as his father had been before him, aye, and his grandfather and great-grandfather too, for that matter. Portly in build, jovial in countenance and somewhat bald of pate, Mr. Jellyband was indeed a typical rural John Bull of those days—the days when our prejudiced insularity was at its height, when to an Englishman, be he lord, yeoman, or peasant, the whole of the continent of Europe was a den of immorality and the rest of the world an unexploited land of savages and cannibals.

There he stood, mine worthy host, fine and well set up on his limbs, smoking his long churchwarden and caring nothing for nobody at home, and despising everybody abroad. He wore the typical scarlet waistcoat, with shiny brass buttons, the corduroy breeches, the grey worsted stockings and smart buckled shoes that characterized every self-respecting innkeeper in Great Britain in these days—and while pretty, motherless Sally had need of four pairs of brown hands to do all the work that fell on her shapely shoulders, worthy Jellyband discussed the affairs of nations with his most privileged guests.

The coffee-room indeed, lighted by two well-polished lamps, which hung from the raftered ceiling, looked cheerful and cosy in the extreme. Through the dense clouds of tobacco smoke that hung about in every corner, the faces of Mr. Jellyband's customers appeared red and pleasant to look at, and on good terms with themselves, their host and all the world; from every side of the room loud guffaws accompanied pleasant, if not highly intellectual, conversation—while Sally's repeated giggles testified to the good use Mr. Harry Waite was making of the short time she seemed inclined to spare him.

They were mostly fisher-folk who patronized Mr. Jellyband's coffee-room, but fishermen are known to be very thirsty people; the salt which they breathe in, when they are on the sea, accounts for their parched throats when on shore. But *The Fisherman's Rest* was something more than a rendezvous for these humble folk. The London and Dover coach started from the hostel daily, and passengers who had come across the Channel, and those who started for the "grand tour," all became acquainted with Mr. Jellyband, his French wines and his home-brewed ales.

It was towards the close of September, 1792, and the weather, which had been brilliant and hot throughout the month, had suddenly broken up; for two days torrents of rain had deluged the south of England, doing its level best to ruin what chances the apples and pears and late plums had of becoming really fine, self-respecting fruit. Even now it was beating against the leaded windows, and tumbling down the chimney, making the cheerful wood fire sizzle in the hearth.

"Lud! did you ever see such a wet September, Mr. Jellyband?" asked Mr. Hempseed.

He sat in one of the seats inside the hearth, did Mr. Hempseed, for he was an authority and an important personage not only at *The Fisherman's Rest*, where Mr. Jellyband always made a special selection of him as a foil for political arguments, but throughout the neighbourhood, where his learning and notably his knowledge of the Scriptures was held in the most profound awe and respect. With one hand buried in the capacious pockets of his corduroys underneath his elaborately-worked, well-worn smock, the other holding his long clay pipe, Mr. Hempseed sat there looking dejectedly across the room at the rivulets of moisture which trickled down the window-panes.

"No," replied Mr. Jellyband, sententiously, "I dunno, Mr. 'Empseed, as I ever did. An' I've been in these parts nigh on sixty years."

"Aye! you wouldn't recillect the first three years of them sixty, Mr. Jellyband," quietly interposed Mr. Hempseed. "I dunno as I ever see'd an infant take much note of the weather, leastways not in these parts, an' *I've* lived 'ere nigh on seventy-five years, Mr. Jellyband."

The superiority of this wisdom was so incontestable that for the moment Mr. Jellyband was not ready with his usual flow of argument.

"It do seem more like April than September, don't it?" continued Mr. Hempseed, dolefully, as a shower of raindrops fell with a sizzle upon the fire.

"Aye! that it do," assented the worthy host, "but then what can you 'xpect, Mr. 'Empseed, I says, with a government as we've got?"

Mr. Hempseed shook his head with an infinity of wisdom, tempered by deeply-rooted mistrust of the British climate and the British Government.

"I don't 'xpect nothing, Mr. Jellyband," he said. "Pore folks like us is of no account up there in Lunnon, I knows that, and it's not often as I do complain. But when it comes to sich wet weather in September, and all me fruit a-rottin' and a-dryin' like the 'Guptian mothers' first-born, and doin' no more good than they did, pore dears, save to a lot of Jews, pedlars and sich, with their oranges and sich like foreign ungodly fruit, which nobody'd buy if English apples and pears was nicely swelled. As the Scriptures say——"

"That's quite right, Mr. 'Empseed," retorted Jellyband, "and as I says, what can you 'xpect? There's all them Frenchy devils over the Channel yonder a-murderin' their king and nobility, and Mr. Pitt and Mr. Fox and Mr. Burke a-fightin' and a-wranglin' between them, if we Englishmen should 'low them to go on in their ungodly way. 'Let 'em murder!' says Mr. Pitt. 'Stop 'em!' says Mr. Burke."

"And let 'em murder, says I, and be demmed to 'em," said Mr. Hempseed, emphatically, for he had but little liking for his friend Jellyband's political arguments, wherein he always got out of his depth, and had but little chance for displaying those pearls of wisdom which had earned for him so high a reputation in the neighbourhood and so many free tankards of ale at *The Fisherman's Rest.*

"Let 'em murder," he repeated again, "but don't let's 'ave sich rain in September, for that is agin the law and the Scriptures which says——"

"Lud! Mr. 'Arry, 'ow you made me jump!"

It was unfortunate for Sally and her flirtation that this remark of hers should have occurred at the precise moment when Mr. Hempseed was collecting his breath, in order to deliver himself of one of those Scriptural utterances which had made him famous, for it brought down upon her pretty head the full flood of her father's wrath.

"Now then, Sally, me girl, now then!" he said, trying to force a frown upon his good-humoured face, "stop that fooling with them young jackanapes and get on with the work."

"The work's gettin' on all ri', father."

But Mr. Jellyband was peremptory. He had other views for his buxom daughter, his only child, who would in God's good time become the owner of *The Fisherman's Rest*, than to see her married to one of these young fellows who earned but a precarious livelihood with their net.

"Did ye hear me speak, me girl?" he said in that quiet tone, which no one inside the inn dared to disobey. "Get on with my Lord Tony's supper, for, if it ain't the best we can do, and 'e not satisfied, see what you'll get, that's all."

Reluctantly Sally obeyed.

"Is you 'xpecting special guests then to-night, Mr. Jellyband?" asked Jimmy Pitkin, in a loyal attempt to divert his host's attention from the circumstances connected with Sally's exit from the room.

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"Aye! that I be," replied Jellyband, "friends of my Lord Tony hisself. Dukes and duchesses from over the water yonder, whom the young lord and his friend, Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, and other young noblemen have helped out of the clutches of them murderin' devils."

But this was too much for Mr. Hempseed's querulous philosophy.

"Lud!" he said, "what they do that for, I wonder? I don't 'old not with interferin' in other folks' ways. As the Scriptures say——"

"Maybe, Mr. 'Empseed," interrupted Jellyband, with biting sarcasm, "as you're a personal friend of Mr. Pitt, and as you says along with Mr. Fox: 'Let 'em murder!' says you."

"Pardon me, Mr. Jellyband," feebly protested Mr. Hempseed, "I dunno as I ever did."

But Mr. Jellyband had at last succeeded in getting upon his favourite hobby-horse, and had no intention of dismounting in any hurry.

"Or maybe you've made friends with some of them French chaps 'oo they do say have come over here o' purpose to make us Englishmen agree with their murderin' ways."

"I dunno what you mean, Mr. Jellyband," suggested Mr. Hempseed, "all I know is——"

"All *I* know is," loudly asserted mine host, "that there was my friend Peppercorn, 'oo owns the *Blue-Faced Boar*, an' as true and loyal an Englishman as you'd see in the land. And now look at 'im!—'E made friends with some o' them frog-eaters, 'obnobbed with them just as if they was Englishmen, and not just a lot of immoral, God-forsakin' furrin' spies. Well! and what happened? Peppercorn 'e now ups and talks of revolutions, and liberty, and down with the aristocrats, just like Mr. 'Empseed over 'ere."

"Pardon me, Mr. Jellyband," again interposed Mr. Hempseed, feebly, "I dunno as I ever did——"

Mr. Jellyband had appealed to the company in general, who were listening awe-struck, and open-mouthed at the recital of Mr. Peppercorn's defalcations. At one table two customers—gentlemen apparently by their clothes—had pushed aside their half-finished game of dominoes, and had been listening for some time, and evidently with much amusement, at Mr. Jellyband's international opinions. One of them now, with a quiet, sarcastic smile still lurking round the corners of his mobile mouth, turned towards the centre of the room where Mr. Jellyband was standing.

"You seem to think, mine honest friend," he said quietly, "that these Frenchmen—spies I think you called them—are mighty clever fellows to have made mincement, so to speak, of your friend Mr. Peppercorn's opinions. How did they accomplish that now, think you?"

"Lud! sir, I suppose they talked 'im over. Those Frenchies, I've 'eard it said, 'ave got the gift of the gab—and Mr. 'Empseed 'ere will tell you 'ow it is that they just twist some people round their little finger like."

"Indeed, and is that so, Mr. Hempseed?" inquired the stranger politely.

"Nay, sir!" replied Mr. Hempseed, much irritated, "I dunno as I can give you the information you require."

"Faith, then," said the stranger, "let us hope, my worthy host, that these clever spies will not succeed in upsetting your extremely loyal opinions."

But this was too much for Mr. Jellyband's pleasant equanimity. He burst into an uproarious fit of laughter, which was soon echoed by those who happened to be in his debt.

"Hahaha! hohoho! hehehe!" He laughed in every key, did my worthy host, and laughed until his sides ached, and his eyes streamed. "At me! hark at that! Did ye 'ear 'im say that they'd be upsettin' my opinions?—Eh?—Lud love you, sir, but you do say some queer things."

"Well, Mr. Jellyband," said Mr. Hempseed, sententiously, "you know what the Scriptures say: 'Let 'im 'oo stands take 'eed lest 'e fall.' "

"But then hark'ee, Mr. 'Empseed," retorted Jellyband, still holding his sides with laughter, "the Scriptures didn't know me. Why, I wouldn't so much as drink a glass of ale with one o' them murderin' Frenchmen, and nothin' 'd make me change my opinions. Why! I've 'eard it said that them frog-eaters can't even speak the King's English, so, of course, if any of 'em tried to speak their God-forsaken lingo to me, why, I should spot them directly—see! —and forewarned is forearmed, as the saying goes."

"Aye! my honest friend," assented the stranger cheerfully, "I see that you are much too sharp, and a match for any twenty Frenchmen, and here's to your very good health, my worthy host, if you'll do me the honour to finish this bottle of wine with me."

"I am sure you're very polite, sir," said Mr. Jellyband, wiping his eyes, which were still streaming with the abundance of his laughter, "and I don't mind if I do."

The stranger poured out a couple of tankards full of wine, and having offered one to mine host, he took the other himself.

"Loyal Englishmen as we all are," he said, whilst the same humorous smile played round the corners of his thin lips—"loyal as we are, we must admit that this at least is one good thing which comes to us from France."

"Aye! we'll none of us deny that, sir," assented mine host.

"And here's to the best landlord in England, our worthy host, Mr. Jellyband," said the stranger in a loud tone of voice.

"Hip, hip, hurrah!" retorted the whole company present. Then there was loud clapping of hands, and mugs and tankards made a rattling music upon the tables to the accompaniment of loud laughter at nothing in particular, and of Mr. Jellyband's muttered exclamations—

"Just fancy *me* bein' talked over by any God-forsaken furriner!—What?—Lud love you, sir, but you do say some queer things."

To which obvious fact the stranger heartily assented. It was certainly a preposterous suggestion that anyone could ever upset Mr. Jellyband's firmly-rooted opinions anent the utter worthlessness of the inhabitants of the whole continent of Europe.

3

THE REFUGEES

Feeling in every part of England certainly ran very high at this time against the French and their doings. Smugglers and legitimate traders between the French and English coasts brought snatches of news from over the water, which made every honest Englishman's blood boil, and made him long to have "a good go" at those murderers, who had imprisoned their king and all his family, subjected the queen and the royal children to every species of indignity, and were even now loudly demanding the blood of the whole Bourbon family and of every one of its adherents.

The execution of the Princesse de Lamballe, Marie Antoinette's young and charming friend, had filled every one in England with unspeakable horror, the daily execution of scores of royalists of good family, whose only sin was their aristocratic name, seemed to cry for vengeance to the whole of civilized Europe.

Yet, with all that, no one dared to interfere. Burke had exhausted all his eloquence in trying to induce the British Government to fight the revolutionary government of France, but Mr. Pitt, with characteristic prudence, did not feel that this country was fit yet to embark on another arduous and costly war. It was for Austria to take the initiative; Austria, whose fairest daughter was even now a dethroned queen, imprisoned and insulted by a howling mob: and surely 'twas not—so argued Mr. Fox—for the whole of England to take up arms, because one set of Frenchmen chose to murder another.

As for Mr. Jellyband and his fellow John Bulls, though they looked upon all foreigners with withering contempt, they were royalist and anti-revolutionists to a man, and at this present moment were furious with Pitt for his caution and moderation, although they naturally understood nothing of the diplomatic reasons which guided that great man's policy.

But now Sally came running back, very excited and very eager. The joyous company in the coffee-room had heard nothing of the noise outside, but she had spied a dripping horse and rider who had stopped at the door of *The Fisherman's Rest* and while the stable boy ran forward to take charge of the horse, pretty Sally went to the front door to greet the welcome visitor.

"I think I see'd my Lord Antony's horse out in the yard, father," she said, as she ran across the coffee-room.

But already the door had been thrown open from outside, and the next moment an arm, covered in drab cloth and dripping with the heavy rain, was round pretty Sally's waist, while a hearty voice echoed along the polished rafters of the coffee-room.

"Aye, and bless your brown eyes for being so sharp, my pretty Sally," said the man who had just entered, whilst worthy Mr. Jellyband came bustling forward, eager, alert and fussy, as became the advent of one of the most favoured guests of his hostel.

"Lud, I protest, Sally," added Lord Antony, as he deposited a kiss on Miss Sally's blooming cheeks, "but you are growing prettier and prettier every time I see you—and my honest friend, Jellyband here, must have hard work to keep the fellows off that slim waist of yours. What say you, Mr. Waite?"

Mr. Waite—torn between his respect for my lord and his dislike of that particular type of joke—only replied with a doubtful grunt.

Lord Antony Dewhurst, one of the sons of the Duke of Exeter, was in those days a very perfect type of a young English gentleman—tall, well set up, broad of shoulders and merry of face, his laughter rang loudly wherever he went. A good sportsman, a lively companion, a courteous well-bred man of the world, with not too much brains to spoil his temper, he was a universal favourite in London drawing-rooms or in the coffee-rooms of village inns. At *The Fisherman's Rest* every one knew him—for he was fond of a trip across to

France, and always spent a night under worthy Mr. Jellyband's roof on his way there or back.

He nodded to Waite, Pitkin and the others as he at last released Sally's waist, and crossed over to the hearth to warm and dry himself: as he did so, he cast a quick, somewhat suspicious glance at the two strangers, who had quietly resumed their game of dominoes, and for a moment a look of deep earnestness, even of anxiety, clouded his jovial young face.

But only for a moment; the next he had turned to Mr. Hempseed, who was respectfully touching his forelock.

"Well, Mr. Hempseed, and how is the fruit?"

"Badly, my lord, badly," replied Mr. Hempseed, dolefully, "but what can you 'xpect with this 'ere government favourin' them rascals over in France, who would murder their king and all their nobility?"

"Odd's life!" retorted Lord Antony; "so they would, honest Hempseed,—at least those they can get hold of, worse luck! But we have got some friends coming here to-night, who at any rate have evaded their clutches."

It almost seemed, when the young man said these words, as if he threw a defiant look towards the quiet strangers in the corner.

"Thanks to you, my lord, and to your friends, so I've heard it said," said Mr. Jellyband.

But in a moment Lord Antony's hand fell warningly on mine host's arm.

"Hush!" he said peremptorily, and instinctively once again looked towards the strangers.

"Oh! Lud love you, they are all right, my lord," retorted Jellyband; "don't you be afraid. I wouldn't have spoken, only I knew we were among friends. That gentleman over there is as true and loyal a subject of King George as you are yourself, my lord, saving your presence. He is but lately arrived in Dover, and is settling down in business in these parts."

"In business? Faith, then, it must be as an undertaker, for I vow I never beheld a more rueful countenance."

"Nay, my lord, I believe that the gentleman is a widower, which no doubt would account for the melancholy of his bearing—but he is a friend, nevertheless, I'll vouch for that—and you will own, my lord, that who should judge of a face better than the landlord of a popular inn——"

"Oh, that's all right, then, if we are among friends," said Lord Antony, who evidently did not care to discuss the subject with his host. "But, tell me, you have no one else staying here, have you?"

"No one, my lord, and no one coming either, leastways——"

"Leastways?"

"No one your lordship would object to, I know."

"Who is it?"

"Well, my lord, Sir Percy Blakeney and his lady will be here presently, but they ain't a-going to stay——"

"Lady Blakeney?" queried Lord Antony, in some astonishment.

"Aye, my lord. Sir Percy's skipper was here just now. He says that my lady's brother is crossing over to France to-day in the *Day Dream*, which is Sir Percy's yacht, and Sir Percy and my lady will come with him as far as here to see the last of him. It don't put you out, do it, my lord?"

"No, no, it doesn't put me out, friend; nothing will put me out, unless that supper is not the very best which Miss Sally can cook, and which has ever been served in *The Fisherman's Rest.*"

"You need have no fear of that my lord," said Sally, who all this while had been busy setting the table for supper. And very gay and inviting it looked, with a large bunch of brilliantly-coloured dahlias in the centre, and the bright pewter goblets and blue china about.

"How many shall I lay for, my lord?"

"Five places, pretty Sally, but let the supper be enough for ten at least—our friends will be tired, and, I hope, hungry. As for me, I vow I could demolish a baron of beef to-night."

"Here they are, I do believe," said Sally excitedly, as a distant clatter of horses and wheels could now be distinctly heard, drawing rapidly nearer.

There was general commotion in the coffee-room. Every one was curious to see my Lord Antony's swell friends from over the water. Miss Sally cast one or two quick glances at the little bit of mirror which hung on the wall, and worthy Mr. Jellyband bustled out in order to give the first welcome himself to his distinguished guests. Only the two strangers in the corner did not participate in the general excitement. They were calmly finishing their game of dominoes, and did not even look once towards the door.

"Straight ahead, Comtesse, the door on your right," said a pleasant voice outside.

"Aye! there they are, all right enough," said Lord Antony joyfully; "off with you, my pretty Sally, and see how quickly you can dish up the soup."

The door was thrown wide open, and, preceded by Mr. Jellyband, who was profuse in his bows and welcomes, a party of four—two ladies and two gentlemen—entered the coffee-room.

"Welcome! Welcome to old England!" said Lord Antony effusively, as he came eagerly forward with both hands outstretched towards the new-comers.

"Ah, you are Lord Antony Dewhurst, I think," said one of the ladies, speaking with a strong foreign accent.

"At your service, Madame," he replied, as he ceremoniously kissed the hands of both the ladies, then turned to the men and shook them warmly by the hand.

Sally was already helping the ladies to take off their travelling-cloaks, and both turned, with a shiver, towards the brightly-blazing hearth.

There was a general movement among the company in the coffee-room. Sally had bustled off to her kitchen, whilst Jellyband, still profuse with his respectful salutations, arranged one or two chairs around the fire. Mr. Hempseed, touching his forelock, was quietly vacating the seat in the hearth. Every one was staring curiously, yet deferentially, at the foreigners.

"Ah, Messieurs! what can I say?" said the elder of the two ladies, as she stretched a pair of fine, aristocratic hands to the warmth of the blaze, and looked with unspeakable gratitude first at Lord Antony, then at one of the young men who had accompanied her party, and who was busy divesting himself of his heavy, caped coat.

"Only that you are glad to be in England, Comtesse," replied Lord Antony, "and that you have not suffered too much from your trying voyage."

"Indeed, indeed, we are glad to be in England," she said, while her eyes filled with tears, "and we have already forgotten all that we have suffered."

Her voice was musical and low, and there was a great deal of calm dignity and of many sufferings nobly endured marked in the handsome, aristocratic face, with its wealth of snow-white hair dressed high above the forehead, after the fashion of the times.

"I hope my friend, Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, proved an entertaining travelling companion, Madame?"

"Ah, indeed, Sir Andrew was kindness itself. How could my children and I ever show enough gratitude to you all, Messieurs?"

Her companion, a dainty, girlish figure, childlike and pathetic in its looks of fatigue and of sorrow, had said nothing as yet, but her eyes, large, brown, and full of tears, looked up from the fire and sought those of Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, who had drawn near to the hearth and to her; then, as they met his, which were fixed with unconcealed admiration upon the sweet face before him, a thought of warmer colour rushed up to her pale cheeks.

"So this is England," she said, as she looked round with childlike curiosity at the open hearth, the oak rafters, and the yokels with their elaborate smocks and jovial, rubicund, British countenances.

"A bit of it, Mademoiselle," replied Sir Andrew, smiling, "but all of it at your service."

The young girl blushed again, but this time a bright smile, fleet and sweet, illumined her dainty face. She said nothing, and Sir Andrew, too, was silent, yet those two young people understood one another, as young people have a way of doing all the world over, and have done since the world began.

"But I say, supper!" here broke in Lord Antony's jovial voice, "supper, honest Jellyband. Where is that pretty wench of yours and the dish of soup? Zooks, man, while you stand there gaping at the ladies, they will faint with hunger."

"One moment! one moment, my lord," said Jellyband, as he threw open the door that led to the kitchen and shouted lustily: "Sally! Hey, Sally there, are ye ready, my girl?"

Sally was ready, and the next moment she appeared in the doorway carrying a gigantic tureen, from which rose a cloud of steam and an abundance of savoury odour.

"Odd's my life, supper at last!" ejaculated Lord Antony, merrily, as he gallantly offered his arm to the Comtesse.

"May I have the honour?" he added ceremoniously, as he led her towards the supper table.

There was general bustle in the coffee-room: Mr. Hempseed and most of the yokels and fisher-folk had gone to make way for "the quality," and to finish smoking their pipes elsewhere. Only the two strangers stayed on, quietly and unconcernedly playing their game of dominoes and sipping their wine; whilst at another table Harry Waite, who was fast losing his temper, watched pretty Sally bustling round the table.

She looked a very dainty picture of English rural life, and no wonder that the susceptible young Frenchman could scarce take his eyes off her pretty face. The Vicomte de Tournay was scarce nineteen, a beardless boy, on whom the terrible tragedies which were being enacted in his own country had made but little impression. He was elegantly and even foppishly dressed, and once safely landed in England he was evidently ready to forget the horrors of the Revolution in the delights of English life.

"Pardi, if zis is England," he said as he continued to ogle Sally with marked satisfaction, "I am of it satisfied."

It would be impossible at this point to record the exact exclamation which escaped through Mr. Harry Waite's clenched teeth. Only respect for "the quality," and notably for my Lord Antony, kept his marked disapproval of the young foreigner in check.

"Nay, but this *is* England, you abandoned young reprobate," interposed Lord Antony with a laugh, "and do not, I pray, bring your loose foreign ways into this most moral country."

Lord Antony had already sat down at the head of the table, with the Comtesse on his right. Jellyband was bustling round, filling glasses and putting chairs straight. Sally waited, ready to hand round the soup. Mr. Harry Waite's friends had at last succeeded in taking him out of the room, for his temper was growing more and more violent under the Vicomte's obvious admiration for Sally.

"Suzanne," came in stern, commanding accents from the rigid Comtesse.

Suzanne blushed again; she had lost count of time and of place, whilst she stood beside the fire, allowing the handsome young Englishman's eyes to dwell upon her sweet face, and his hand, as if unconsciously, to rest upon hers. Her mother's voice brought her back to reality once more, and with a submissive "Yes, Mama," she, too, took her place at the supper table.

4

THE LEAGUE OF THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL

THEY all looked a merry, even a happy party, as they sat round the table; Sir Andrew Ffoulkes and Lord Antony Dewhurst, two typical good-looking, well-born and well-bred Englishmen of that year of grace 1792, and the aristocratic French comtesse with her two children, who had just escaped from such dire perils and found a safe retreat at last on the shores of protecting England.

In the corner the two strangers had apparently finished their game; one of them arose, and standing with his back to the merry company at the table, he adjusted with much deliberation his large triple-caped coat. As he did so, he gave one quick glance all around him. Every one was busy laughing and chatting, and he murmured the words "All safe!": his companion then, with the alertness born of long practice, slipped on to his knees in a moment, and the next had crept noiselessly under the oak bench. The stranger then with a loud "Good night," quietly walked out of the coffee-room.

Not one of those at the supper table had noticed the curious and silent manœuvre, but when the stranger finally closed the door of the coffee-room behind him, they all instinctively sighed a sigh of relief.

"Alone, at last!" said Lord Antony, jovially.

Then the young Vicomte de Tournay rose, glass in hand, and with the graceful affectation peculiar to the times he raised it aloft, and said in broken English—

"To His Majesty George Three of England. God bless him for his hospitality to us all, poor exiles from France."

"His Majesty the King!" echoed Lord Antony and Sir Andrew, as they drank loyally to the toast.

"To His Majesty King Louis of France," added Sir Andrew, with solemnity. "May God protect him, and give him victory over his enemies."

Every one rose and drank this toast in silence. The fate of the unfortunate King of France, then a prisoner of his own people, seemed to cast a gloom even over Mr. Jellyband's pleasant countenance.

"And to M. le Comte de Tournay de Basserive," said Lord Antony, merrily. "May we welcome him in England before many days are over."

"Ah, Monsieur," said the Comtesse, as with a slightly trembling hand she conveyed her glass to her lips, "I scarcely dare to hope."

But already Lord Antony had served out the soup, and for the next few moments all conversation ceased, while Jellyband and Sally handed round the plates, and every one began to eat.

"Faith, Madame!" said Lord Antony, after a while, "mine was no idle toast; seeing yourself, Mademoiselle Suzanne and my friend the Vicomte safely in England now, surely you must feel reassured as to the fate of Monsieur le Comte."

"Ah, Monsieur," replied the Comtesse, with a heavy sigh, "I trust in God—I can but pray—and hope. . . ."

"Aye, Madame!" here interposed Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, "trust in God by all means, but believe also a little in your English friends, who have sworn to bring the Count safely across the Channel, even as they have brought you to-day."

"Indeed, indeed, Monsieur," she replied. "I have the fullest confidence in you and in your friends. Your fame, I assure you, has spread throughout the whole of France. The way some of my own friends have escaped from the clutches of that awful revolutionary tribunal was nothing short of a miracle—and all done by you and your friends——"

"We were but the hands, Madame la Comtesse. . . ."

"But my husband, Monsieur," said the Comtesse, while unshed tears seemed to veil her voice, "he is in such deadly peril—I never would have left him, only . . . there were my children . . . I was torn between my duty to him and to them. They refused to go without me . . . and you and your friends assured me so solemnly that my husband would be safe. But, oh! now that I am here—amongst you all—in this beautiful, free England—I think of him, flying for his life, hunted like a poor beast . . . in such peril. . . . Ah!

I should not have left him. . . . I should not have left him! . . ."

The poor woman had completely broken down; fatigue, sorrow and emotion had overmastered her rigid, aristocratic bearing. She was crying gently to herself, whilst Suzanne ran up to her and tried to kiss away her tears.

Lord Antony and Sir Andrew had said nothing to interrupt the Comtesse whilst she was speaking. There was no doubt that they felt deeply for her; their very silence testified to that—but in every century, and ever since England has been what it is, an Englishman has always felt somewhat ashamed of his own emotion and of his own sympathy. And so the two young men said nothing and busied themselves in trying to hide their feelings, only succeeding in looking immeasurably sheepish.

"As for me, Monsieur," said Suzanne, suddenly, as she looked through a wealth of brown curls across at Sir Andrew, "I trust you absolutely, and I know that you will bring my dear father safely to England, just as you brought us to-day."

This was said with so much confidence, such unuttered hope and belief, that it seemed as if by magic to dry the mother's eyes, and to bring a smile upon everybody's lips.

"Nay! you shame me, Mademoiselle," replied Sir Andrew; "though my life is at your service, I have been but a humble tool in the hands of our great leader, who organized and effected your escape."

He had spoken with so much warmth and vehemence that Suzanne's eyes fastened upon him in undisguised wonder.

"Your leader, Monsieur?" said the Comtesse, eagerly. "Ah! of course, you must have a leader.

And I did not think of that before! But tell me where is he? I must go to him at once, and I and my children must throw ourselves at his feet, and thank him for all that he has done for us."

"Alas, Madame!" said Lord Antony, "that is impossible."

"Impossible?—Why?"

"Because the Scarlet Pimpernel works in the dark, and his identity is only known under a solemn oath of secrecy to his immediate followers."

"The Scarlet Pimpernel?" said Suzanne, with a merry laugh. "Why! what a droll name! What is the Scarlet Pimpernel, Monsieur?"

She looked at Sir Andrew with eager curiosity. The young man's face had become almost transfigured. His eyes shone with enthusiasm; hero-worship, love, admiration for his leader seemed literally to glow upon his face.

"The Scarlet Pimpernel, Mademoiselle," he said at last, "is the name of a humble English wayside flower; but it is also the name chosen to hide the identity of the best and bravest man in all the world, so that he may better succeed in accomplishing the noble task he has set himself to do."

"Ah, yes," here interposed the young Vicomte, "I have heard speak of this Scarlet Pimpernel. A little flower—red?—yes! They say in Paris that every time a royalist escapes to England that devil, Foucquier Tinville, the Public Prosecutor, receives a paper with that little flower dessinated in red upon it. . . . Yes?"

"Yes, that is so," assented Lord Antony.

"Then he will have received one such paper today?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Oh! I wonder what he will say!" said Suzanne, merrily. "I have heard that the picture of that little red flower is the only thing that frightens him."

"Faith, then," said Sir Andrew, "he will have many more opportunities of studying the shape of that small scarlet flower."

"Ah! Monsieur," sighed the Comtesse, "it all sounds like a romance, and I cannot understand it all."

"Why should you try, Madame?"

"But tell me, why should your leader—why should you all—spend your money and risk your lives—for it is your lives you risk, Messieurs, when you set foot in France—and all for us French men and women, who are nothing to you?"

"Sport, Madame la Comtesse, sport," asserted Lord Antony, with his jovial, loud and pleasant voice; "we are a nation of sportsmen, you know, and just now it is the fashion to pull the hare from between the teeth of the hound."

"Ah, no, no, not sport only, Monsieur . . . you have a more noble motive, I am sure, for the good work you do."

"Faith, Madame, I would like you to find it then; as for me, I vow, I love the game, for this is the finest sport I have yet encountered.—Hair-breadth escapes . . . the devil's own risks!—Tally ho!—and away we go!"

But the Comtesse shook her head, still incredulously. To her it seemed preposterous that these young men and their great leader, all of them rich, probably well-born, and young, should, for no other motive than sport, run the terrible risks which she knew they were constantly doing. Their nationality, once they had set foot in France, would be no safeguard to them. Any-one found harbouring or assisting suspected royalists would be ruthlessly condemned and summarily executed, whatever his nationality might be. And this band of young Englishmen had, to her own knowledge, bearded the implacable and bloodthirsty tribunal of the Revolutionary, within the very walls of Paris itself, and had snatched away condemned victims almost from the very foot of the guillotine. With a shudder, she recalled the events of the last few days, her escape from Paris with her two children, all three of them hidden beneath the hood of a rickety cart, and lying amidst a heap of turnips and cabbages, not daring to breathe, whilst the mob howled "À la lanterne les aristos!" at that awful West Barricade.

It had all occurred in such a miraculous way: she and her husband had understood that they had been placed on the list of "suspected persons," which meant that their trial and death was but a matter of days—of hours, perhaps.

Then came the hope of salvation; the mysterious epistle, signed with the enigmatical scarlet device; the clear, peremptory directions; the parting from the Comte de Tournay, which had torn the poor wife's heart in two; the hope of reunion; the flight with her two children; the covered cart; that awful hag driving it, who looked like some horrible evil demon, with the ghastly trophy on her whip handle!

The Comtesse looked round at the quaint, old-fashioned English inn, the peace of this land of civil and religious liberty, and she closed her eyes to shut out the haunting vision of that West Barricade, and of the mob retreating panic-stricken when the old hag spoke of the plague.

Every moment under that cart she expected recognition, arrest, herself and her children tried and condemned, and these young Englishmen, under the guidance of their brave and mysterious leader, had risked their lives to save them all, as they had already saved scores of other innocent people.

And all only for sport? Impossible! Suzanne's eyes as she sought those of Sir Andrew plainly told him that she thought that *he* at any rate rescued his fellow-men from terrible and unmerited death through a higher and nobler motive than his friend would have her believe.

"How many are there in your brave league, Monsieur?" she asked timidly.

"Twenty all told, Mademoiselle," he replied, "one to command, and nineteen to obey. All of us Englishmen, and all pledged to the same cause—to obey our leader and to rescue the innocent."

"May God protect you all, Messieurs," said the Comtesse, fervently.

"He has done that so far, Madame."

"It is wonderful to me, wonderful!—That you should all be so brave, so devoted to your fellow-men—yet you are English!—and in France treachery is rife—all in the name of liberty and fraternity."

"The women even, in France, have been more bitter against us aristocrats than the men," said the Vicomte, with a sigh.

"Ah, yes," added the Comtesse, whilst a look of haughty disdain and intense bitterness shot through her melancholy eyes. "There was that woman, Marguerite St. Just, for instance. She denounced the Marquis de St. Cyr and all his family to the awful tribunal of the Terror."

"Marguerite St. Just?" said Lord Antony, as he shot a quick and apprehensive glance across at Sir Andrew. "Marguerite St. Just?—Surely . . ."

"Yes!" replied the Comtesse, "surely you know her. She was a leading actress of the Comédie Française, and she married an Englishman lately. You must know her——"

"Know her?" said Lord Antony. "Know Lady Blakeney—the most fashionable woman in London—the wife of the richest man in England? Of course, we all know Lady Blakeney."

"She was a school-fellow of mine at the convent in Paris," interposed Suzanne, "and we came over to England together to learn your language. I was very fond of Marguerite, and I cannot believe that she ever did anything so wicked."

"It certainly seems incredible," said Sir Andrew. "You say that she actually denounced the Marquis de St. Cyr? Why should she have done such a thing? Surely there must be some mistake——"

"No mistake is possible, Monsieur," rejoined the Comtesse, coldly. "Marguerite St. Just's brother is a noted republican. There was some talk of a family feud between him and my cousin, the Marquis de St. Cyr. The St. Justs are quite plebeian, and the republican government employs many spies. I assure you there is no mistake. . . . You had not heard this story?"

"Faith, Madame, I did hear some vague rumours of it, but in England no one would credit it. . . . Sir Percy Blakeney, her husband, is a very wealthy man of high social position, the intimate friend of the Prince of Wales . . . and Lady Blakeney leads both fashion and Society in London."

"That may be, Monsieur, and we shall, of course, lead a very quiet life in England, but I pray God that while I remain in this beautiful country I may never meet Marguerite St. Just.

The proverbial wet-blanket seemed to have fallen over the merry little company gathered round the table.

Suzanne looked sad and silent; Sir Andrew fidgeted uneasily with his fork, whilst the Comtesse, encased in the plate-armour of her aristocratic prejudices, sat, rigid and unbending, in her straight-backed chair. As for Lord Antony, he looked extremely uncomfortable, and glanced once or twice apprehensively towards Jellyband, who looked just as uncomfortable as himself.

"At what time do you expect Sir Percy and Lady Blakeney?" he contrived to whisper unobserved, to mine host.

"Any moment, my lord," whispered Jellyband in reply.

Even as he spoke, a distant clatter was heard of an approaching coach: louder and louder it grew, one or two shouts became distinguishable, then the rattle of horses' hoofs on the uneven cobble stones, and the next moment a stable boy had thrown open the coffee-room door and rushed in excitedly.

"Sir Percy Blakeney and my lady," he shouted at the top of his voice, "they're just arriving."

And with more shouting, jingling of harness, and iron hoofs upon the stones, a magnificent coach, drawn by four superb bays, had halted outside the porch of *The Fisherman's Rest.*

5

MARGUERITE

In a moment the pleasant oak-raftered coffee-room of the inn became the scene of hopeless confusion and discomfort. At the first announcement, made by the stable boy, Lord Antony, with a fashionable oath, had jumped up from his seat and was now giving many and confused directions to poor bewildered Jellyband, who seemed at his wits' end what to do.

"For goodness' sake, man," admonished his lordship, "try to keep Lady Blakeney talking outside for a moment, while the ladies withdraw. Zounds!" he added, with another more emphatic oath, "this is most unfortunate."

"Quick, Sally! the candles!" shouted Jellyband, as hopping about from one leg to another, he ran hither and thither, adding to the general discomfort of everybody.

The Comtesse, too, had risen to her feet; rigid and erect, trying to hide her excitement beneath more becoming *sang-froid*, she repeated mechanically—

"I will not see her!—I will not see her!"

Outside, the excitement attendant upon the arrival of very important guests grew apace.

"Good day, Sir Percy!—Good day to your ladyship! Your servant, Sir Percy!"—was heard in one long, continued chorus, with alternate more feeble tones of —"Remember the poor blind man! of your charity, lady and gentleman!"

Then suddenly a singularly sweet voice was heard through all the din.

"Let the poor man be—and give him some supper at my expense."

The voice was low and musical, with a slight singsong in it, and a faint *soupçon* of foreign intonation in the pronunciation of the consonants.

Every one in the coffee-room heard it and paused, instinctively listening to it for a moment. Sally was holding the candles by the opposite door, which led to the bedrooms upstairs, and the Comtesse was in the act of beating a hasty retreat before that enemy who owned such a sweet musical voice; Suzanne reluctantly was preparing to follow her mother, whilst casting regretful glances towards the door, where she hoped still to see her dearly-beloved erstwhile school-fellow.

Then Jellyband threw open the door, still stupidly and blindly hoping to avert the catastrophe which he felt was in the air, and the same low, musical voice said, with a merry laugh and mock consternation—

"B-r-r-r-r! I am as wet as a herring! Dieu! has anyone ever seen such a contemptible climate?"

"Suzanne, come with me at once—I wish it," said the Comtesse, peremptorily.

"Oh! Mama!" pleaded Suzanne.

"My lady . . . er . . . h'm! . . . my lady! . . ." came in feeble accents from Jellyband, who stood clumsily trying to bar the way.

"Pardieu, my good man," said Lady Blakeney, with some impatience, "what are you standing in my way for, dancing about like a turkey with a sore foot? Let me get to the fire, I am perished with the cold."

And the next moment Lady Blakeney, gently pushing mine host on one side, had swept into the coffee-room.

There are many portraits and miniatures extant of Marguerite St. Just—Lady Blakeney as she was then—but it is doubtful if any of these really do her singular beauty justice. Tall, above the average, with magnificent presence and regal figure, it is small wonder that even the Comtesse paused for a moment in involuntary admiration before turning her back on so fascinating an apparition.

Marguerite Blakeney was then scarcely five-and-twenty, and her beauty was at its most dazzling stage. The large hat, with its undulating and waving plumes, threw a soft shadow across the classic brow with the aureole of auburn hair—free at the moment from any powder; the sweet, almost childlike mouth, the straight chiselled nose, round chin, and delicate throat, all seemed set off by the picturesque costume of the period. The rich blue velvet robe moulded in its every line the graceful contour of the figure, whilst one tiny hand held, with a dignity all its own, the tall stick adorned with a large bunch of ribbons which fashionable ladies of the period had taken to carrying recently.

With a quick glance all round the room, Marguerite Blakeney had taken stock of every one there. She nodded pleasantly to Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, whilst extending a hand to Lord Antony.

"Hello! my Lord Tony, why—what are *you* doing here in Dover?" she said merrily.

Then, without waiting for a reply, she turned and faced the Comtesse and Suzanne. Her whole face lighted up with additional brightness, as she stretched out both arms towards the young girl.

"Why! if that isn't my little Suzanne over there! Pardieu, little citizeness, how came you to be in England? And Madame too!"

She went up effusively to them both, with not a single touch of embarrassment in her manner or in her smile. Lord Tony and Sir Andrew watched the little scene with eager apprehension. English though they were, they had often been in France, and had mixed sufficiently with the French to realize the unbending hauteur, the bitter hatred with which the old *noblesse* of France viewed all those who had helped to contribute to their downfall. Armand St. Just, the brother of beautiful Lady Blakeney—though known to hold moderate, and conciliatory views—was an ardent republican: his feud with the ancient family of St. Cyr—the rights and wrongs of which no outsider ever knew—had culminated in the downfall, the almost total extinction of the latter. In France, St. Just and his party had triumphed, and here in England, face to face with these three refugees driven from their country, flying for their lives, bereft of all which centuries of luxury had given them, there stood a fair scion of those same republican families which had hurled down a throne, and uprooted an aristocracy whose origin was lost in the dim and distant vista of bygone centuries.

She stood there before them, in all the unconscious insolence of beauty, and stretched out her dainty hand to them, as if she would, by that one act, bridge over the conflict and bloodshed of the past decade.

"Suzanne, I forbid you to speak to that woman," said the Comtesse sternly, as she placed a restraining hand upon her daughter's arm.

She had spoken in English, so that all might hear and understand; the two young English gentlemen as well as the common innkeeper and his daughter. The latter literally gasped with horror at this foreign insolence, this impudence before her ladyship—who was English, now that she was Sir Percy's wife, and a friend of the Princess of Wales to boot.

As for Lord Antony and Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, their very hearts seemed to stand still with horror at this gratuitous insult. One of them uttered an exclamation of appeal, the other one of warning, and instinctively both glanced hurriedly towards the door, whence a slow, drawly, not unpleasant voice had already been heard.

Alone among those present Marguerite Blakeney and the Comtesse de Tournay had remained seemingly unmoved. The latter, rigid, erect and defiant, with one hand still upon her daughter's arm, seemed the very personification of unbending pride. For the moment Marguerite's sweet face had become as white as the soft fichu which swathed her throat, and a very keen observer might have noted that the hand which held the tall, be-ribboned stick was clenched, and trembled somewhat.

But this was only momentary; the next instant the delicate eyebrows were raised slightly, the lips curved sarcastically upwards, the clear blue eyes looked straight at the rigid Comtesse, and with a slight shrug of the shoulders—

"Hoity-toity, citizeness," she said gaily, "what fly stings you, pray?"

"We are in England now, Madame," rejoined the Comtesse, coldly, "and I am at liberty to forbid my daughter to touch your hand in friendship. Come, Suzanne."

She beckoned to her daughter, and without another look at Marguerite Blakeney, but with a deep, old-fashioned curtsy to the two young men, she sailed majestically out of the room.

There was silence in the old inn parlour for a moment, as the rustle of the Comtesse's skirts died away down the passage. Marguerite, rigid as a statue, followed with hard, set eyes the upright figure, as it disappeared through the doorway—but as little Suzanne, humble and obedient, was about to follow her mother, the hard, set expression suddenly vanished, and a wistful, almost pathetic and childlike look stole into Lady Blakeney's eyes.

Little Suzanne caught that look; the child's sweet nature went out to the beautiful woman, scarce older than herself; filial obedience banished before girlish sympathy; at the door she turned, ran back to Marguerite, and putting her arms round her, kissed her effusively; then only did she follow her mother, Sally bringing up the rear, with a pleasant smile on her dimpled face, and with a final curtsy to my lady.

Suzanne's sweet and dainty impulse had relieved the unpleasant tension. Sir Andrew's eyes followed the pretty little figure, until it had quite disappeared, then they met Lady Blakeney's with unassumed merriment.

Marguerite, with dainty affectation, had kissed her hand to the ladies, as they disappeared through the door, then a humorous smile began hovering round the corners of her mouth.

"So that's it, is it?" she said gaily. "La! Sir Andrew, did you ever see such an unpleasant person? I hope when I grow old I shan't look like that."

She gathered up her skirts, and assuming a majestic gait, stalked towards the fireplace.

"Suzanne," she said, mimicking the Comtesse's voice, "I forbid you to speak to that woman!"

The laugh which accompanied this sally sounded perhaps a trifle forced and hard, but neither Sir Andrew nor Lord Tony were very keen observers. The mimicry was so perfect, the tone of the voice so accurately reproduced, that both the young men joined in a hearty, cheerful "Bravo!"

"Ah! Lady Blakeney!" added Lord Tony, "how they must miss you at the Comédie Française, and how the Parisians must hate Sir Percy for having taken you away."

"Lud, man," rejoined Marguerite, with a shrug of her graceful shoulders, "'tis impossible to hate Sir Percy for anything; his witty sallies would disarm even Madame la Comtesse herself."

The young Vicomte, who had not elected to follow his mother in her dignified exit, now made a step forward, ready to champion the Comtesse should Lady Blakeney aim any further shafts at her. But before he could utter a preliminary word of protest, a pleasant, though distinctly inane laugh, was heard from outside, and the next moment an unusually tall and very richly-dressed figure appeared in the doorway.

6

AN EXQUISITE OF '92

Sir Percy Blakeney, as the chronicles of the time inform us, was in this year of grace 1792, still a year or two on the right side of thirty. Tall, above the average, even for an Englishman, broad-shouldered and massively built, he would have been called unusually good-looking, but for a certain lazy expression in his deep-set blue eyes, and that perpetual inane laugh which seemed to disfigure his strong, clearly-cut mouth.

It was nearly a year ago now that Sir Percy Blakeney, Bart., one of the richest men in England, leader of all the fashions, and intimate friend of the Prince of Wales, had astonished fashionable society in London and Bath, by bringing home, from one of his journeys abroad, a beautiful, fascinating, clever, French wife. He, the sleepiest, dullest, most British Britisher that had ever set a pretty woman yawning, had secured a brilliant matrimonial prize for which, as all chroniclers aver, there had been many competitors.

Marguerite St. Just had first made her début in artistic Parisian circles, at the very moment when the greatest social upheaval the world has ever known was taking place within its very walls. Scarcely eighteen, lavishly gifted with beauty and talent, chaperoned only by a young and devoted brother, she had soon gathered round her in her charming apartment in the Rue Richelieu, a coterie which was as brilliant as it was exclusive—exclusive, that is to say, only from one point of view. Marguerite St. Just was from principle and by conviction a republican—equality of birth was her motto—inequality of fortune was in her eyes a mere untoward accident, but the only inequality she admitted was that of talent. "Money and titles may be hereditary," she would say, "but brains are not," and thus her charming salon was reserved for originality and intellect, for brilliance and wit, for clever men and talented women, and the entrance into it was soon looked upon in the world of intellect—which even in those days and in those troublous times found its pivot in Paris—as the seal to an artistic career.

Clever men, distinguished men, and even men of exalted station formed a perpetual and brilliant court round the fascinating young actress of the Comédie Française, and she glided through republican, revolutionary, bloodthirsty Paris like a shining comet with a trail behind her of all that was most distinguished, most interesting, in intellectual Europe.

Then the climax came. Some smiled indulgently and called it an artistic eccentricity, others looked upon it as a wise provision, in view of the many events which were crowding thick and fast in Paris just then, but to all, the real motive of that climax remained a puzzle and a mystery. Anyway, Marguerite St. Just married Sir Percy Blakeney one fine day, just like that, without any warning to her friends, without a *soirée de contrat*, or *dîner de fiançailles* or other appurtenances of a fashionable French wedding.

How that stupid, dull Englishman ever came to be admitted within the intellectual circle which revolved round "the cleverest woman in Europe," as her friends unanimously called her, no one ventured to guess—a golden key is said to open every door, asserted the more malignantly inclined.

Enough, she married him, and "the cleverest woman in Europe" had linked her fate to that "demmed idiot" Blakeney, and not even her most intimate friends could assign to this strange step any other motive than that of supreme eccentricity. Those friends who knew, laughed to scorn the idea that Marguerite St. Just had married a fool for the sake of the worldly advantages with which he might endow her. They knew, as a matter of fact, that Marguerite St. Just cared nothing about money, and still less about a title; moreover, there were at least half a dozen other men in the cosmopolitan world equally well-born, if not so wealthy as Blakeney, who would have been only too happy to give Marguerite St. Just any position she might choose to covet.

As for Sir Percy himself, he was universally voted to be totally unqualified for the onerous part he had taken upon himself. His chief qualifications for it seemed to consist in his blind adoration for her, his great wealth, and the high favour in which he stood at the English court ; but London society thought that, taking into consideration his own intellectual limitations it would have been wiser on his part, had he bestowed those worldly advantages upon a less brilliant and witty wife.

Although lately he had been so prominent a figure in fashionable English society, he had spent most of his early life abroad. His father, the late Sir Algernon Blakeney, had had the terrible misfortune of seeing an idolized young wife become hopelessly insane after two years of happy married life. Percy had just been born when the late Lady Blakeney fell a prey to the terrible malady which in those days was looked upon as hopelessly incurable and nothing short of a curse of God upon the entire family. Sir Algernon took his afflicted young wife abroad, and there presumably Percy was educated, and grew up between an imbecile mother and a distracted father, until he attained his majority. The death of his parents following close upon one another left him a free man, and as Sir Algernon had led a forcibly simple and retired life, the large Blakeney fortune had increased tenfold.

Sir Percy Blakeney had travelled a great deal abroad, before he brought home his beautiful young French wife. The fashionable circles of the time were ready to receive them both with open arms. Sir Percy was rich, his wife was accomplished, the Prince of Wales took a very great liking to them both. Within six months they were the acknowledged leaders of fashion and of style. Sir Percy's coats were the talk of the town, his inanities were quoted, his foolish laugh copied by the gilded youth at Almack's or the Mall. Every one knew that he was hopelessly stupid, but then that was scarcely to be wondered at, seeing that all the Blakeneys, for generations, had been notoriously dull and that his mother had died an imbecile.

Thus society accepted him, petted him, made much of him, since his horses were the finest in the country, his fêtes and wines the most sought after. As for his marriage with "the cleverest woman in Europe," well! the inevitable came with sure and rapid footsteps. No one pitied him, since his fate was of his own making. There were plenty of young ladies in England, of high birth and good looks, who would have been quite willing to help him to spend the Blakeney fortune, whilst smiling indulgently at his inanities and his good-humoured foolishness. Moreover, Sir Percy got no pity, because he seemed to require none—he seemed very proud of his clever wife, and to care little that she took no pains to disguise that good-natured contempt which she evidently felt for him, and that she even amused herself by sharpening her ready wits at his expense.

But then Blakeney was really too stupid to notice the ridicule with which his clever wife covered him, and if his matrimonial relations with the fascinating Parisienne had not turned out all that his hopes and his dog-like devotion for her had pictured, society could never do more than vaguely guess at it.

In his beautiful house at Richmond he played second fiddle to his clever wife with imperturbable *bonhomie*; he lavished jewels and luxuries of all kinds upon her, which she took with inimitable grace, dispensing the hospitality of his superb mansion with the same graciousness with which she had welcomed the intellectual coterie of Paris.

Physically, Sir Percy Blakeney was undeniably handsome—always excepting the lazy, bored look which was habitual to him. He was always irreproachably dressed, and wore the exaggerated "Incroyable" fashions, which had just crept across from Paris to England, with the perfect good taste innate in an English gentleman. On this special afternoon in September, in spite of the long journey by coach, in spite of rain and mud, his coat sat irreproachably across his fine shoulders, his hands looked almost femininely white, as they emerged through billowy frills of finest Mechlin lace—the extravagantly short-waisted satin coat, wide-lapelled waistcoat, and tight-fitting striped breeches, set off his massive figure to perfection, and in repose one might have admired so fine a specimen of English manhood, until the foppish ways, the affected movements, the perpetual inane laugh, brought one's admiration of Sir Percy Blakeney to an abrupt close.

He had lolled into the old-fashioned inn parlour, shaking the wet off his fine overcoat; then putting up a gold-rimmed eye-glass to his lazy blue eye, he surveyed the company, upon whom an embarrassed silence had suddenly fallen.

"How do, Tony! How do, Ffoulkes?" he said, recognizing the two young men and shaking them by the hand. "Zounds, my dear fellow," he added, smothering a slight yawn, "did you ever see such a beastly day? Demmed climate this."

With a quaint little laugh, half of embarrassment and half of sarcasm, Marguerite had turned towards her husband, and was surveying him from head to foot, with an amused little twinkle in her merry blue eyes.

"La!" said Sir Percy, after a moment or two's silence, as no one offered any comment, "how sheepish you all look. . . . What's up?"

"Oh, nothing, Sir Percy," replied Marguerite, with a certain amount of gaiety, which, however, sounded somewhat forced, "nothing to disturb your equanimity—only an insult to your wife."

The laugh which accompanied this remark was evidently intended to reassure Sir Percy as to the gravity of this incident. It apparently succeeded in that, for echoing the laugh, he rejoined placidly—

"La, m'dear! you don't say so. Begad! who was the bold man who dared to tackle you—eh?"

Lord Tony tried to interpose, but had no time to do so, for the young Vicomte had already quickly stepped forward.

"Monsieur," he said, prefixing his little speech with an elaborate bow, and speaking in broken English, "my mother, the Comtesse de Tournay de Basserive, has offended Madame, who, I see, is your wife. I cannot ask your pardon for my mother; what she does is right in my eyes. But I am ready to offer you the usual reparation between men of honour."

The young man drew up his slim stature to its full height and looked very enthusiastic, very proud, and very hot as he gazed at six foot odd of gorgeousness, as represented by Sir Percy Blakeney, Bart.

"Lud, Sir Andrew," said Marguerite, with one of her merry infectious laughs, "look on that pretty picture—the English turkey and the French bantam."

The simile was quite perfect, and the English turkey looked down with complete bewilderment upon the dainty little French bantam, which hovered quite threateningly around him.

"La! sir," said Sir Percy at last, putting up his eyeglass and surveying the young Frenchman with undisguised wonderment, "where, in the cuckoo's name, did you learn to speak English?"

"Monsieur!" protested the Vicomte, somewhat abashed at the way his warlike attitude had been taken by the ponderous-looking Englishman.

"I protest 'tis marvellous!" continued Sir Percy, imperturbably, "demmed marvellous! Don't you think so, Tony—eh? I vow I can't speak the French lingo like that. What?"

"Nay, I'll vouch for that!" rejoined Marguerite. "Sir Percy has a British accent you could cut with a knife."

"Monsieur," interposed the Vicomte earnestly and in still more broken English, "I fear you have not understand. I offer you the only posseeble reparation among gentlemen."

"What the devil is that?" asked Sir Percy blandly.

"My sword, Monsieur," replied the Vicomte, who, though still bewildered, was beginning to lose his temper.

"You are a sportsman, Lord Tony," said Marguerite merrily; "ten to one on the little bantam."

But Sir Percy was staring sleepily at the Vicomte for a moment or two, through his partly closed heavy lids, then he smothered another yawn, stretched his long limbs, and turned leisurely away.

"Lud love you, sir," he muttered good-humouredly. "Demmit, young man, what's the good of your sword to me?"

What the Vicomte thought and felt that moment when that long-limbed Englishman treated him with such marked insolence, might fill volumes of sound reflections. . . . What he said resolved itself into a single articulate word, for all the others were choked in his throat by his surging wrath—

"A duel, Monsieur," he stammered.

Once more Blakeney turned, and from his high altitude looked down on the choleric little man before him; but not even for a second did he seem to lose his own imperturbable good-humour. He laughed his own pleasant and inane laugh, and burying his slender, long hands into the capacious pockets of his overcoat, he said leisurely—

"A duel? La! is that what he meant? Odd's fish! you are a bloodthirsty young ruffian. Do you want to make a hole in a law-abiding man? . . . As for me, sir, I never fight duels," he added, as he placidly sat down and stretched his long, lazy legs out before him. "Demmed uncomfortable things, duels, ain't they, Tony?"

Now the Vicomte had no doubt vaguely heard that in England the fashion of duelling amongst gentlemen had been suppressed by the law with a very stern hand; still to him, a Frenchman, whose notions of bravery and honour were based upon a code that had centuries of tradition to back it, the spectacle of a gentleman actually refusing to fight a duel was little short of an enormity. In his mind he vaguely pondered whether he should strike that long-legged Englishman in the face and call him a coward, or whether such conduct in a lady's presence might be deemed ungentlemanly, when Marguerite happily interposed.

"I pray you, Lord Tony," she said in that gentle, sweet, musical voice of hers, "I pray you play the peacemaker. The child is bursting with rage, and," she added with a *soupçon* of dry sarcasm, "might do Sir Percy an injury." She laughed a mocking little laugh, which, however, did not in the least disturb her husband's placid equanimity.

"The British turkey has had the day," she said. "Sir Percy would provoke all the saints in the calendar and keep his temper the while."

But already Blakeney, good-humoured as ever, had joined in the laugh against himself.

"Demmed smart that now, wasn't it?" he said, turning pleasantly to the Vicomte. "Clever woman my wife, sir. . . . You will find *that* out if you live long enough in England."

"Sir Percy is in the right, Vicomte," here interposed Lord Antony, laying a friendly hand on the young Frenchman's shoulder. "It would hardly be fitting that you should commence your career in England by provoking him to a duel."

For a moment longer the Vicomte hesitated, then with a slight shrug of the shoulders directed against the extraordinary code of honour prevailing in this fog-ridden island, he said with becoming dignity—

"Ah, well! if Monsieur is satisfied, I have no griefs. You, mi'lor', are our protector. If I have done wrong, I withdraw myself."

"Aye, do!" rejoined Blakeney, with a long sigh of satisfaction, "withdraw yourself over there. Demmed excitable little puppy," he added under his breath. "Faith, Ffoulkes, if that's a specimen of the goods you and your friends bring over from France, my advice to you is, drop 'em 'mid Channel, my friend, or I shall have to see old Pitt about it, get him to clap on a prohibitive tariff, and put you in the stocks an you smuggle."

"La, Sir Percy, your chivalry misguides you," said Marguerite, coquettishly, "you forget that you yourself have imported one bundle of goods from France."

Blakeney slowly rose to his feet, and, making a deep and elaborate bow before his wife, he said with consummate gallantry—

"I had the pick of the market, Madame, and my taste is unerring."

"More so than your chivalry, I fear," she retorted sarcastically.

"Odd's life, m'dear! be reasonable! Do you think I am going to allow my body to be made a pincushion of by every little frog-eater who don't like the shape of your nose?"

"Lud, Sir Percy!" laughed Lady Blakeney as she bobbed him a quaint and pretty curtsy, "you need not be afraid! 'Tis not the *men* who dislike the shape of my nose."

"Afraid be demmed! Do you impugn my bravery, Madame? I don't patronize the ring for nothing, do I, Tony? I've put up the fists with Red Sam before now, and—and he didn't get it all his own way either——"

"S'faith, Sir Percy," said Marguerite, with a long and merry laugh that went echoing along the old oak rafters of the parlour, "I would I had seen you then . . . ha! ha! ha! ha!—you must have looked a pretty picture . . . and . . . and to be afraid of a little French boy . . . ha! ha! . . . ha! ha!"

"Ha! ha! ha! he! he! he!" echoed Sir Percy, good-humouredly. "La, Madame, you honour me! Zooks! Ffoulkes, mark ye that! I have made my wife laugh!—the cleverest woman in Europe! . . . Odd's fish, we must have a bowl on that!" and he tapped vigorously on the table near him. "Hey! Jelly! Quick, man! Here, Jelly!"

Harmony was once more restored. Mr. Jellyband, with a mighty effort, recovered himself from the many emotions he had experienced within the last half-hour.

"A bowl of punch, Jelly, hot and strong, eh?" said Sir Percy. "The wits that have just made a clever woman laugh must be whetted! Ha! ha! ha! Hasten, my good Jelly!"

"Nay, there is no time, Sir Percy," interposed Marguerite. "The skipper will be here directly and my brother must get on board, or the *Day Dream* will miss the tide."

"Time, m'dear? There is plenty of time for any gentleman to get drunk and get on board before the turn of the tide."

"I think, your ladyship," said Jellyband, respectfully, "that the young gentleman is coming along now with Sir Percy's skipper."

"That's right," said Blakeney, "then Armand can join us in the merry bowl. Think you, Tony," he added, turned towards the Vicomte, "that that jackanapes of yours will join us in a glass? Tell him that we drink in token of reconciliation."

"In fact you are all such merry company," said Marguerite, "that I trust you will forgive me if I bid my brother good-bye in another room."

It would have been bad form to protest. Both Lord Antony and Sir Andrew felt that Lady Blakeney could not altogether be in tune with them at that moment. Her love for her brother, Armand St. Just, was deep and touching in the extreme. He had just spent a few weeks with her in her English home, and was going back to serve his country, at a moment when death was the usual reward for the most enduring devotion.

Sir Percy also made no attempt to detain his wife. With that perfect, somewhat affected gallantry which characterized his every movement, he opened the coffee-room door for her, and made her the most approved and elaborate bow which the fashion of the time dictated, as she sailed out of the room without bestowing on him more than a passing, slightly contemptuous glance. Only Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, whose very thought since he had met Suzanne de Tournay seemed keener, more gentle, more innately sympathetic, noted the curious look of intense longing, of deep and hopeless passion, with which the inane and flippant Sir Percy followed the retreating figure of his brilliant wife.

7

THE SECRET ORCHARD

Once outside the noisy coffee-room, alone in the dimly-lighted passage, Marguerite Blakeney seemed to breathe more freely. She heaved a deep sigh, like one who had long been oppressed with the heavy weight of constant self-control, and she allowed a few tears to fall unheeded down her cheeks.

Outside the rain had ceased, and through the swiftly passing clouds, the pale rays of an after-storm sun shone upon the beautiful white coast of Kent and the quaint, irregular houses that clustered round the Admiralty Pier. Marguerite Blakeney stepped on to the porch and looked out to sea. Silhouetted against the ever-changing sea, a graceful schooner, with white sails, was gently dancing in the breeze. The *Day Dream* it was, Sir Percy Blakeney's yacht, which was ready to take Armand St. Just back to France into the very midst of that seething, bloody Revolution which was overthrowing a monarchy, attacking a religion, destroying a society, in order to try and rebuild upon the ashes of tradition a new Utopia, of which a few men dreamed but which none had the power to establish.

In the distance two figures were approaching *The Fisherman's Rest*: one, an oldish man, with a curious fringe of grey hairs round a rotund and massive chin, and who walked with a peculiar rolling gait which invariably betrays the seafaring man: the other, a young, slight figure, neatly and becomingly dressed in a dark, many-caped overcoat; he was clean shaved, and his dark hair was taken well back over a clear and noble forehead.

"Armand!" said Marguerite Blakeney, as soon as she saw him approaching from the distance, and a happy smile shone on her sweet face, even through the tears.

A minute or two later brother and sister were locked in each other's arms, while the old skipper stood respectfully on one side.

"How much time have we got, Briggs?" asked Lady Blakeney, "before M. St. Just need go on board?"

"We ought to weigh anchor before half an hour, your ladyship," replied the old man, pulling at his grey forelock.

Linking her arm in his, Marguerite led her brother towards the cliffs.

"Half an hour," she said, looking wistfully out to sea, "half an hour more and you'll be far from me, Armand! Oh! I can't believe that you are going, dear! These last few days—whilst Percy has been away, and I've had you all to myself, have slipped by like a dream."

"I am not going far, sweet one," said the young man gently, "a narrow channel to cross—a few miles of road—I can soon come back."

"Nay, 'tis not the distance, Armand—but that awful Paris . . . just now. . . ."

They had reached the edge of the cliff. The gentle sea-breeze blew Marguerite's hair about her face, and sent the ends of her soft lace fichu waving round her like a white and supple snake. She tried to pierce the distance far away, beyond which lay the shores of France: that relentless and stern France which was exacting her pound of flesh, the blood-tax from the noblest of her sons.

"Our own beautiful country, Marguerite," said Armand, who seemed to have divined her thoughts.

"They are going too far, Armand," she said vehemently. "You are a republican, so am I . . . we have the same thoughts, the same enthusiasm for liberty and equality . . . but even *you* must think that they are going too far. . . ."

"Hush!—" said Armand, instinctively, as he threw quick, apprehensive glance around him.

"Ah! you see: you don't think yourself that it is safe even to speak of these things—here in England!" She clung to him suddenly with strong, almost motherly passion: "Don't go, Armand!" she begged; "don't go back! What should I do if . . . if . . . if . . ."

Her voice was choked with sobs, her eyes, tender, blue and loving, gazed appealingly at the young man, who in his turn looked steadfastly into hers.

"You would in any case be my own brave sister," he said gently, "who would remember that, when France is in peril, it is not for her sons to turn their backs on her."

Even as he spoke, that sweet, childlike smile crept back into her face, pathetic in the extreme, for it seemed drowned in tears.

"Oh! Armand!" she said quaintly, "I sometimes wish you had not so many lofty virtues. . . . I assure you little sins are far less dangerous and uncomfortable. But you *will* be prudent?" she added earnestly.

"As far as possible . . . I promise you."

"Remember, dear, I have only you . . . to . . . to care for me. . . ."

"Nay, sweet one, you have other interests now. Percy cares for you. . . ."

A look of strange wistfulness crept into her eyes as she murmured—

"He did . . . once . . ."

"But surely . . ."

"There, there, dear, don't distress yourself on my account. Percy is very good . . ."

"Nay!" he interrupted energetically, "I will distress myself on your account, my Margot. Listen, dear, I have not spoken on these things to you before; something always seemed to stop me when I wished to question you. But, somehow, I feel as if I could not go away and leave you now without asking you one question. . . . You need not answer it if you do not wish," he added, as he noted a sudden hard look, almost of apprehension, darting through her eyes.

"What is it?" she asked simply.

"Does Sir Percy Blakeney know that . . . I mean, does he know the part you played in the arrest of the Marquis de St. Cyr?"

She laughed—a mirthless, bitter, contemptuous laugh, which was like a jarring chord in the music of her voice.

"That I denounced the Marquis de St. Cyr, you mean, to the tribunal that ultimately sent him and all his family to the guillotine? Yes, he does know. . . . I told him after I married him. . . ."

"You told him all the circumstances—which so completely exonerated you from any blame?"

"It was too late to talk of 'circumstances'; he heard the story from other sources; my confession came too tardily, it seems. I could no longer plead extenuating circumstances: I could not demean myself by trying to explain——"

"And?"

"And now I have the satisfaction, Armand, of knowing that the biggest fool in England has the most complete contempt for his wife."

She spoke with vehement bitterness this time, and Armand St. Just, who loved her so dearly, felt that he had placed a somewhat clumsy finger upon an aching wound.

"But Sir Percy loved you, Margot," he repeated gently.

"Loved me?—Well, Armand, I thought at one time that he did, or I should not have married him. I dare say," she added, speaking very rapidly, as if she were glad at last to lay down a heavy burden, which had oppressed her for months, "I dare say that even you thought—as everybody else did—that I married Sir Percy because of his wealth—but I assure you, dear, that it was not so. He seemed to worship me with a curious intensity of concentrated passion, which went straight to my heart. I had never loved anyone before, as you know, and I was four-and-twenty then—so I naturally thought it was not in my nature to love. But it has always seemed to me that it *must* be *heavenly* to be loved blindly, passionately, wholly . . . worshipped, in fact—and the very fact that Percy was slow and stupid was an attraction for me, as I thought he would love me all the more. A clever man would naturally have other interests, an ambitious man other hopes. . . . I thought that a fool would worship, and think of nothing else. And I was ready to respond, Armand; I would have allowed myself to be worshipped, and given infinite tenderness in return. . . ."

She sighed—and there was a world of disillusionment in that sigh. Armand St. Just had allowed her to speak on without interruption: he listened to her, whilst allowing his own thoughts to run riot. It was terrible to see a young and beautiful woman—a girl in all but name—still standing almost at the threshold of her life, yet bereft of hope, bereft of illusions, bereft of those golden and fantastic dreams, which should have made her youth one long, perpetual holiday.

Yet perhaps—though he loved his sister dearly—perhaps he understood: he had studied men in many countries, men of all ages, men of every grade of social and intellectual status, and inwardly he understood what Marguerite had left unsaid. Granted that Percy Blakeney was dull-witted, but in his slow-going mind there would still be room for that ineradicable pride of a descendant of a long line of English gentlemen. A Blakeney had died on Bosworth Field, another had sacrificed life and fortune for the sake of a treacherous Stuart, and that same pride—foolish and prejudiced as the republican Armand would call it—must have been stung to the quick on hearing of the sin which lay at Lady Blakeney's door. She had been young, misguided, ill-advised perhaps. Armand knew that, and those who took advantage of Marguerite's youth, her impulses and imprudence, knew it still better; but Blakeney was slow-witted, he would not listen to "circumstances," he only clung to facts, and these had shown him Lady Blakeney denouncing a fellow-man to a tribunal that knew no pardon, and the contempt he would feel for the deed she had done, however unwittingly, would kill that same love in him, in which sympathy and intellectuality could never have had a part.

Yet even now, his own sister puzzled him. Life and love are such strange vagaries. Could it be that with the waning of her husband's love, Marguerite's heart had awakened with love for him? Strange extremes meet in love's pathway: this woman, who had had half intellectual Europe at her feet, might perhaps have set her affections on a fool. Marguerite was gazing out towards the sunset. Armand could not see her face, but presently it seemed to him that something which glittered for a moment in the golden evening light, fell from her eyes upon her dainty fichu of lace.

But he could not broach that subject with her. He knew her strange, passionate nature so well, and knew that reserve which lurked behind her frank, open ways.

They had always been together, these two, for their parents had died when Armand was still a youth and Marguerite but a child. He, some eight years her senior, had watched over her until her marriage; had chaperoned her during those brilliant years spent in the flat of the Rue de Richelieu, and had seen her enter upon this new life of hers, here in England, with much sorrow and some foreboding.

This was his first visit to England since her marriage, and the few months of separation had already seemed to have built up a slight, thin partition between brother and sister; the same deep, intense love was still there, on both sides, but each now seemed to have a secret orchard, into which the other dared not penetrate.

There was much Armand St. Just could not tell his sister; the political aspect of the Revolution in France was changing almost every day; she might not understand how his own views and sympathies might become modified, even as the excesses, committed by those who had been his friends, grew in horror and in intensity. And Marguerite could not speak to her brother about the secrets of her heart, she hardly understood them herself, she only knew that, in the midst of luxury, she felt lonely and unhappy.

And now Armand was going away; she feared for his safety, she longed for his presence. She would not spoil these last few sadly-sweet moments by speaking about herself. She led him gently along the cliffs, then down to the beach; their arms linked in one another's, they had still so much to say, that lay just outside that secret orchard of theirs.

8

THE ACCREDITED AGENT

THE afternoon was rapidly drawing to a close, and a long, chilly English summer's evening was throwing a misty pall over the green Kentish landscape.

The *Day Dream* had set sail, and Marguerite Blakeney stood alone on the edge of the cliff for over an hour, watching those white sails which bore so swiftly away from her the only being who really cared for her, whom she dared to love, whom she knew she could trust.

Some little distance away to her left the lights from the coffee-room of *The Fisherman's Rest* glittered yellow in the gathering mist; from time to time it seemed to her aching nerves as if she could catch from thence the sound of merry-making and of jovial talk, or even that perpetual, senseless laugh of her husband's, which grated continually upon her sensitive ears.

Sir Percy had had the delicacy to leave her severely alone. She supposed that, in his own stupid, good-natured way, he may have understood that she would wish to remain alone, while those white sails disappeared into the vague horizon, so many miles away. He, whose notions of propriety and decorum were supersensitive, had not suggested even that an attendant should remain within call. Marguerite was grateful to her husband for all this; she always tried to be grateful to him for his thoughtfulness, which was constant, and for his generosity, which really was boundless. She tried even at times to curb the sarcastic, bitter thoughts of him which made her—in spite of herself—say cruel, insulting things, which she vaguely hoped would wound him.

Yes! she often wished to wound him, to make him feel that she too held him in contempt, that she too had forgotten that once she had almost loved him. Loved that inane fop! whose thoughts seemed unable to soar beyond the tying of a cravat or the new cut of a coat. Bah! And yet! . . . vague memories, that were sweet and ardent and attuned to this calm summer's evening, came wafted back to her memory, on the invisible wings of the light sea-breeze: the time when first he worshipped her; he seemed so devoted—a very slave—and there was a certain latent intensity in that love which had fascinated her.

Then suddenly that love, that devotion, which throughout his courtship she had looked upon as the slavish fidelity of a dog, seemed to vanish completely. Twenty-four hours after the simple little ceremony at old St. Roch, she had told him the story of how, inadvertently, she had spoken of certain matters connected with the Marquis de St. Cyr before some men—her friends—who had used this information against the unfortunate Marquis, and sent him and his family to the guillotine.

She hated the Marquis. Years ago, Armand, her dear brother, had loved Angèle de St. Cyr, but St. Just was a plebeian, and the Marquis full of the pride and arrogant prejudices of his caste. One day Armand, the respectful, timid lover, ventured on sending a small poem—enthusiastic, ardent, passionate—to the idol of his dreams. The next night he was waylaid just outside Paris by the valets of the Marquis de St. Cyr, and ignominiously thrashed—thrashed like a dog within an inch of his life—because he had dared to raise his eyes to the daughter of the aristocrat. The incident was one which, in those days, some two years before the great Revolution, was of almost daily occurrence in France; incidents of that type, in fact, led to the bloody reprisals which a few years later sent most of those haughty heads to the guillotine.

Marguerite remembered it all: what her brother must have suffered in his manhood and his pride must have been appalling; what she suffered through him and with him she never attempted even to analyse.

Then the day of retribution came. St. Cyr and his kind had found their masters in those same plebeians whom they had despised. Armand and Marguerite, both intellectual, thinking beings, adopted with the enthusiasm of their years the Utopian doctrines of the Revolution, while the Marquis de St. Cyr and his family fought inch by inch for the retention of those privileges which had placed them socially above their fellow-men. Marguerite, impulsive, thoughtless, not calculating the purport of her words, still smarting under the terrible insult her brother had suffered at the Marquis' hands, happened to hear—amongst her own coterie—that the St. Cyrs were in treasonable correspondence with Austria, hoping to obtain the Emperor's support to quell the growing revolution in their own country.

In those days one denunciation was sufficient: Marguerite's few thoughtless words, anent the Marquis de St. Cyr, bore fruit within twenty-four hours. He was arrested. His papers were searched: letters from the Austrian Emperor, promising to send troops against the Paris populace, were found in his desk. He was arraigned for treason against the nation, and sent to the guillotine, whilst his family, his wife and his sons, shared this awful fate.

Marquerite, horrified at the terrible consequences of her own thoughtlessness, was powerless to save the Marquis: her own coterie, the leaders of the revolutionary movement, all proclaimed her as a heroine: and when she married Sir Percy Blakeney, she did not perhaps altogether realize how severely he would look upon the sin which she had so inadvertently committed, and which still lay heavily upon her soul. She made full confession of it to her husband, trusting to his blind love for her, her boundless power over him, to soon make him forget what might have sounded unpleasant to an English ear.

Certainly, at the moment he seemed to take it very quietly; hardly, in fact, did he appear to understand the meaning of all she said; but what was more certain still, was that never after that could she detect the slightest sign of that love which she once believed had been wholly hers. Now they had drifted quite apart, and Sir Percy seemed to have laid aside his love for her, as he would an ill-fitting glove. She tried to rouse him by sharpening her ready wit against his dull intellect; endeavoured to excite his jealousy, if she could not rouse his love; tried to goad him to self-assertion, but all in vain. He remained the same, always passive, drawling, sleepy, always courteous, invariably a gentleman: she had all that the world and a wealthy husband can give to a pretty woman, yet on this beautiful summer's evening, with the white sails of the *Day Dream* finally hidden by the evening shadows, she felt more lonely than that poor tramp who plodded his way wearily along the rugged cliffs.

With another heavy sigh, Marguerite Blakeney turned her back upon the sea and cliffs, and walked slowly back towards *The Fisherman's Rest.* As she drew near, the sound of revelry, of gay, jovial laughter, grew louder and more distinct. She could distinguish

Sir Andrew Ffoulkes' pleasant voice, Lord Tony's boisterous guffaws, her husband's occasional, drawly, sleepy comments; then realizing the loneliness of the road and the fast gathering gloom round her, she quickened her steps . . . the next moment she perceived a stranger coming rapidly towards her. Marguerite did not look up; she was not the least nervous and *The Fisherman's Rest* was now well within call.

The stranger paused when he saw Marguerite coming quickly towards him, and just as she was about to slip past him, he said very quietly:

"Citoyenne St. Just."

Marguerite uttered a little cry of astonishment, at thus hearing her own familiar maiden name uttered so close to her. She looked up at the stranger, and this time, with a cry of unfeigned pleasure, she put out both her hands effusively towards him.

"Chauvelin!" she exclaimed.

"Himself, citoyenne, at your service," said the stranger, gallantly kissing the tips of her fingers.

Marguerite said nothing for a moment or two, as she surveyed with obvious delight the not very prepossessing little figure before her. Chauvelin was then nearer forty than thirty—a clever, shrewd-looking personality, with a curious, fox-like expression in the deep, sunken eyes. He was the same stranger who, an hour or two previously, had joined Mr. Jellyband in a friendly glass of wine.

"Chauvelin . . . my friend . . ." said Marguerite, with a pretty little sigh of satisfaction. "I am mightily pleased to see you."

No doubt poor Marguerite St. Just, lonely in the midst of her grandeur, and of her starchy friends, was happy to see a face that brought back memories of that happy time in Paris, when she reigned—a queen

—over the intellectual coterie of the Rue de Richelieu. She did not notice the sarcastic little smile, however, that hovered round the thin lips of Chauvelin.

"But tell me," she added merrily, "what in the world, or whom in the world, are you doing here in England?"

She had resumed her walk towards the inn, and Chauvelin turned and walked beside her.

"I might return the subtle compliment, fair lady," he said. "What of yourself?"

"Oh I?" she said, with a shrug of the shoulders. "Je m'ennuie, mon ami, that is all."

They had reached the porch of *The Fisherman's Rest*, but Marguerite seemed loth to go within. The evening air was lovely after the storm, and she had found a friend who exhaled the breath of Paris, who knew Armand well, who could talk of all the merry, brilliant friends whom she had left behind. So she lingered on under the pretty porch, while through the gaily-lighted dormer-window of the coffee-room came sounds of laughter, of calls for "Sally," and for beer, of tapping of mugs and clinking of dice, mingled with Sir Percy Blakeney's inane and mirthless laugh. Chauvelin stood beside her, his shrewd, pale, yellow eyes fixed on the pretty face, which looked so sweet and childlike in this soft English summer twilight.

"You surprise me, citoyenne," he said quietly, as he took a pinch of snuff.

"Do I now?" she retorted gaily. "Faith, my little Chauvelin, I should have thought that, with your penetration, you would have guessed that an atmosphere composed of fogs and virtues would never suit Marguerite St. Just."

"Dear me! is it as bad as that?" he asked, in mock consternation.

"Quite," she retorted, "and worse."

"Strange! Now, I thought that a pretty woman would have found English country life peculiarly attractive."

"Yes! so did I," she said with a sigh. "Pretty women," she added meditatively, "ought to have a good time in England, since all the pleasant things are forbidden them—the very things they do every day."

"Quite so!"

"You'll hardly believe it, my little Chauvelin," she said earnestly, "but I often pass a whole day—a whole day—without encountering a single temptation."

"No wonder," retorted Chauvelin, gallantly, "that the cleverest woman in Europe is troubled with ennui."

She laughed one of her melodious, rippling, childlike laughs.

"It must be pretty bad, mustn't it?" she said archly, "or I should not have been so pleased to see you."

"And this within a year of a romantic love match! . . ."

"Yes! . . . a year of a romantic love match . . . that's just the difficulty . . ."

"Ah! . . . that idyllic folly," said Chauvelin, with quiet sarcasm, "did not then survive the lapse of . . . weeks?"

"Idyllic follies never last, my little Chauvelin. . . . They come upon us like the measles . . . and are as easily cured."

Chauvelin took another pinch of snuff: he seemed very much addicted to that pernicious habit, so prevalent in those days; perhaps, too, he found the taking of snuff a convenient veil for disguising the quick, shrewd glances with which he strove to read the very souls of those with whom he came in contact.

"No wonder," he repeated, with the same gallantry, "that the most active brain in Europe is troubled with ennui."

"I was in hopes that you had a prescription against the malady, my little Chauvelin."

"How can I hope to succeed in that which Sir Percy Blakeney has failed to accomplish?"

"Shall we leave Sir Percy out of the question for the present, my dear friend?" she said drily.

"Ah! my dear lady, pardon me, but that is just what we cannot very well do," said Chauvelin, whilst once again his eyes, keen as those of a fox on the alert, darted a quick glance at Marguerite. "I have a most perfect prescription against the worst form of ennui, which I would have been happy to submit to you, but——"

"But what?"

"There *is* Sir Percy."

"What has he to do with it?"

"Quite a good deal, I am afraid. The prescription I would offer, fair lady, is called by a very plebeian name Work!"

"Work?"

Chauvelin looked at Marguerite long and scrutinizingly. It seemed as if those keen, pale eyes of his were reading every one of her thoughts. They were alone together; the evening air was quite still, and their soft whispers were drowned in the noise which came from the coffee-room. Still, Chauvelin took a step or two from under the porch, looked quickly and keenly all round him, then, seeing that indeed no one was within earshot, he once more came back close to Marguerite.

"Will you render France a small service, citoyenne?" he asked, with a sudden change of manner, which lent his thin, fox-like face singular earnestness.

"La, man!" she replied flippantly, "how serious you look all of a sudden. . . . Indeed I do not know if I *would* render France a small service—at any rate, it depends upon the kind of service she—or you—want."

"Have you ever heard of the Scarlet Pimpernel, Citoyenne St. Just?" asked Chauvelin, abruptly.

"Heard of the Scarlet Pimpernel?" she retorted with a long and merry laugh, "Faith, man, we talk of nothing else. . . . We have hats 'à la Scarlet Pimpernel'; our horses are called 'Scarlet Pimpernel'; at the Prince of Wales' supper party the other night we had a 'soufflé à la Scarlet Pimpernel.' . . . Lud!" she added gaily, "the other day I ordered at my milliner's a blue dress trimmed with green, and, bless me, if she did not call that 'à la Scarlet Pimpernel.'"

Chauvelin had not moved while she prattled merrily along; he did not even attempt to stop her when her musical voice and her childlike laugh went echoing through the still evening air. But he remained serious and earnest, whilst she laughed, and his voice, clear, incisive, and hard, was not raised above his breath as he said—

"Then, as you have heard of that enigmatical personage, citoyenne, you must also have guessed, and known, that the man who hides his identity under that strange pseudonym, is the most bitter enemy of our republic, of France . . . of men like Armand St. Just."

"La! . . ." she said, with a quaint little sigh, "I dare swear he is. . . . France has many bitter enemies these days."

"But you, citoyenne, are a daughter of France, and should be ready to help her in a moment of deadly peril."

"My brother Armand devotes his life to France," she retorted proudly; "as for me, I can do nothing . . . here in England. . . ."

"Yes, you . . ." he urged still more earnestly, whilst his thin fox-like face seemed suddenly to have grown impressive and full of dignity, "here, in England, citoyenne . . . you alone can help us. . . . Listen! —I have been sent over here by the Republican Government as its representative: I present my credentials to Mr. Pitt in London to-morrow. One of my duties here is to find out all about this League of the Scarlet Pimpernel, which has become a standing menace to France, since it is pledged to help our cursed aristocrats—traitors to their country and enemies of the people—to escape from the just punishment which they deserve. You know as well as I do, citoyenne, that once they are over here, those French émigrés try to rouse public feeling against the Republic. . . . They are ready to join issue with any enemy bold enough to attack France. . . . Now, within the last month, scores of those émigrés, some only suspected of treason, others actually condemned by the Tribunal of Public Safety, have succeeded in crossing the Channel. Their escape in each instance was planned, organized and effected by this society of young English jackanapes, headed by a man whose brain seems as resourceful as his identity is mysterious. All the most strenuous efforts on the part of my spies have failed to discover who he is; whilst the others are the hands, he is the head, who, beneath this strange anonymity, calmly works at the destruction of France. I mean to strike at that head, and for this I want your help—through him afterwards I can reach the rest of the gang: he is a young buck in English society, of that I feel sure. Find that man for me, citoyenne!" he urged, "find him for France!"

Marguerite had listened to Chauvelin's impassioned speech without uttering a word, scarce making a movement, hardly daring to breathe. She had told him before, that this mysterious hero of romance was the talk of the smart set to which she belonged; already, before this, her heart and her imagination had been stirred by the thought of the brave man who, unknown to fame, had rescued hundreds of lives from a terrible, often an unmerciful fate. She had but little real sympathy with those haughty French aristocrats, insolent in their pride of caste, of whom the Comtesse de Tournay de Basserive was so typical an example; but, republican and liberal-minded though she was from principle, she hated and loathed the methods which the young Republic had chosen for establishing itself. She had not been in Paris for some months; the horrors and bloodshed of the Reign of Terror, culminating in the September massacres, had only come across the Channel to her as a faint echo. Robespierre, Danton, Marat, she had not known in their new guise of bloody justiciaries, merciless wielders of the guillotine. Her very soul recoiled in horror from these excesses, to which she feared her brother Armand—moderate republican as he was—might become one day the holocaust.

Then, when first she heard of this band of young English enthusiasts, who, for sheer love of their fellow-men, dragged women and children, old and young men, from a horrible death, her heart had glowed with pride for them, and now, as Chauvelin spoke, her very soul went out to the gallant and mysterious leader of the reckless little band, who risked his life daily, who gave it freely and without ostentation, for the sake of humanity.

Her eyes were moist when Chauvelin had finished speaking, the lace at her bosom rose and fell with her quick, excited breathing; she no longer heard the noise of drinking from the inn, she did not heed her husband's voice or his inane laugh, her thoughts had gone wandering in search of the mysterious hero! Ah! there was a man she might have loved, had he come her way; everything in him appealed to her romantic imagination; his personality, his strength, his bravery, the loyalty of those who served under him in the same noble cause, and, above all, that anonymity which crowned him as if with a halo of romantic glory.

"Find him for France, citoyenne!"

Chauvelin's voice close to her ear roused her from her dreams. The mysterious hero had vanished, and, not twenty yards away from her, a man was drinking and laughing, to whom she had sworn faith and loyalty.

"La! man," she said with a return of her assumed flippancy, "you are astonishing. Where in the world am I to look for him?"

"You go everywhere, citoyenne," whispered Chauvelin, insinuatingly, "Lady Blakeney is the pivot of social London, so I am told . . . you see everything, you *hear* everything."

"Easy, my friend," retorted Marguerite, drawing herself up to her full height and looking down, with a slight thought of contempt on the small, thin figure before her. "Easy! you seem to forget that there are six feet of Sir Percy Blakeney, and a long line of ancestors to stand between Lady Blakeney and such a thing as you propose."

"For the sake of France, citoyenne!" reiterated Chauvelin, earnestly.

"Tush, man, you talk nonsense, anyway; for even if you did know who this Scarlet Pimpernel is, you could do nothing to him—an Englishman!"

"I'd take my chance of that," said Chauvelin, with a dry, rasping little laugh. "At any rate we could send him to the guillotine first to cool his ardour, then, when there is a diplomatic fuss about it, we can apologize—humbly—to the British Government, and, if necessary, pay compensation to the bereaved family."

"What you propose is horrible, Chauvelin," she said, drawing away from him as from some noisome insect. "Whoever the man may be, he is brave and noble, and never—do you hear me?—never would I lend a hand to such villainy."

"You prefer to be insulted by every French aristocrat who comes to this country?"

Chauvelin had taken sure aim when he shot this tiny shaft. Marguerite's fresh young cheeks became a thought more pale and she bit her under lip, for she would not let him see that the shaft had struck home.

"That is beside the question," she said at last with indifference. "I can defend myself, but I refuse to do any dirty work for you—or for France. You have other means at your disposal; you must use them, my friend."

And without another look at Chauvelin, Marguerite Blakeney turned her back on him and walked straight into the inn.

"That is not your last word, citoyenne," said Chauvelin, as a flood of light from the passage illumined her elegant, richly-clad figure, "we meet in London, I hope!"

"We meet in London," she said, speaking over her shoulder at him, "but that is my last word."

She threw open the coffee-room door and disappeared from his view, but he remained under the porch for a moment or two, taking a pinch of snuff. He had received a rebuke and a snub, but his shrewd, fox-like face looked neither abashed nor disappointed; on the contrary, a curious smile, half sarcastic and wholly satisfied played around the corners of his thin lips.

9

THE OUTRAGE

A BEAUTIFUL starlit night had followed on the day of incessant rain: a cool, balmy, late summer's night, essentially English in its suggestion of moisture and scent of wet earth and dripping leaves.

The magnificent coach, drawn by four of the finest thoroughbreds in England, had driven off along the London road, with Sir Percy Blakeney on the box, holding the reins in his slender feminine hands, and beside him Lady Blakeney wrapped in costly furs. A fifty-mile drive on a starlit summer's night! Marguerite had hailed the notion of it with delight. . . . Sir Percy was an enthusiastic whip; his four thoroughbreds, which had been sent down to Dover a couple of days before, were just sufficiently fresh and restive to add zest to the expedition, and Marguerite revelled in anticipation of the few hours of solitude, with the soft night breeze fanning her cheeks, her thoughts wandering, whither away? She knew from old experience that Sir Percy would speak little, if at all: he had often driven her on his beautiful coach for hours at night, from point to point, without making more than one or two casual remarks upon the weather or the state of the roads. He was very fond of driving by night, and she had very quickly adopted his fancy: as she sat next to him hour after hour, admiring the dexterous, certain way in which he handled the reins, she often wondered what went on in that slow-going head of his. He never told her, and she had never cared to ask.

At *The Fisherman's Rest* Mr. Jellyband was going the round, putting out the lights. His bar customers had all gone, but upstairs in the snug little bedrooms, Mr. Jellyband had quite a few important guests: the Comtesse de Tournay, with Suzanne, and the Vicomte, and there were two more bedrooms ready for Sir Andrew Ffoulkes and Lord Antony Dewhurst, if the two young men should elect to honour the ancient hostelry and stay the night.

For the moment these two young gallants were comfortably installed in the coffee-room, before the huge log-fire, which, in spite of the mildness of the evening, had been allowed to burn merrily.

"I say, Jelly, has every one gone?" asked Lord Tony, as the worthy landlord still busied himself clearing away glasses and mugs.

"Every one, as you see, my lord."

"And all your servants gone to bed?"

"All except the boy on duty in the bar, and," added Mr. Jellyband with a laugh, "I expect he'll be asleep afore long, the rascal."

"Then we can talk here undisturbed for half an hour?"

"At your service, my lord. . . . I'll leave your candles on the dresser . . . and your rooms are quite ready . . . I sleep at the top of the house myself, but if your lordship'll only call loudly enough, I dare say I shall hear."

"All right, Jelly . . . and . . . I say, put the lamp out—the fire'll give us all the light we need—and we don't want to attract the passer-by."

"All ri', my lord."

Mr. Jellyband did as he was bid—he turned out the quaint old lamp that hung from the raftered ceiling and blew out all the candles.

"Let's have a bottle of wine, Jelly," suggested Sir Andrew.

"All ri', sir!"

Jellyband went off to fetch the wine. The room now was quite dark, save for the circle of ruddy and fitful light formed by the brightly blazing logs in the hearth.

"Is that all, gentlemen?" asked Jellyband as he returned with a bottle of wine and a couple of glasses, which he placed on the table.

"That'll do nicely, thanks, Jelly!" said Lord Tony.

"Good night, my lord! Good night, sir!"

"Good night, Jelly!"

The two young men listened, whilst the heavy tread of Mr. Jellyband was heard echoing along the passage and staircase. Presently even that sound died out, and the whole of *The Fisherman's Rest* seemed wrapped in sleep, save the two young men drinking in silence beside the hearth.

For a while no sound was heard, even in the coffee-room, save the ticking of the old grandfather's clock and the crackling of the burning wood.

"All right again this time, Ffoulkes?" asked Lord Antony at last.

Sir Andrew had been dreaming evidently, gazing into the fire, and seeing therein, no doubt, a pretty, piquant face, with large brown eyes and a wealth of dark curls round a childish forehead.

"Yes!" he said, still musing, "all right!"

"No hitch?"

"None."

Lord Antony laughed pleasantly as he poured himself out another glass of wine.

"I need not ask, I suppose, whether you found the journey pleasant this time?"

"No, friend, you need not ask," replied Sir Andrew, gaily. "It was all right."

"Then, here's to her very good health," said jovial Lord Tony. "She's a bonnie lass, though she *is* a French one. And here's to your courtship—may it flourish and prosper exceedingly."

He drained his glass to the last drop, then joined his friend beside the hearth.

"Well! you'll be doing the journey next, Tony, I expect," said Sir Andrew, rousing himself from his meditations, "you and Hastings, certainly, and I hope you may have as pleasant a task as I had and as charming a travelling companion. You have no idea, Tony. . . ."

"No! I haven't," interrupted his friend, pleasantly, "but I'll take your word for it. And now," he added, whilst a sudden earnestness crept over his jovial young face, "how about business?"

The two young men drew their chairs closer together, and instinctively, though they were alone, their voices sank to a whisper.

"I saw the Scarlet Pimpernel alone, for a few moments in Calais," said Sir Andrew, "a day or two ago. He crossed over to England two days before we did. He had escorted the party all the way from Paris dressed—you'll never credit it!—as an old market woman, and driving—until they were safely out of the city—the covered cart under which the Comtesse de Tournay, Mlle. Suzanne, and the Vicomte lay concealed among the turnips and cabbages. They themselves, of course, never suspected who their driver was. He drove them right through a line of soldiery and a yelling mob, who were screaming, 'À bas les aristos!' But the market cart got through along with some others, and the Scarlet Pimpernel, in shawl, petticoat, and hood, yelled 'À bas les aristos!' louder than anybody. Faith!" added the young man, as his eyes glowed with enthusiasm for the beloved leader, "that man's a marvel! His cheek is preposterous, I vow!—and that's what carries him through."

Lord Antony, whose vocabulary was more limited than that of his friend, could only find an oath or two with which to show his admiration for his leader.

"He wants you and Hastings to meet him at Calais," said Sir Andrew, more quietly, "on the 2nd of next month. Let me see! that will be next Wednesday."

"Yes."

"It is, of course, the case of the Comte de Tournay, this time; a dangerous task, for the Comte, whose escape from his château, after he had been declared a 'suspect' by the Committee of Public Safety, was a masterpiece of the Scarlet Pimpernel's ingenuity, is now under sentence of death. It will be rare sport to get *him* out of France, and you will have a narrow escape, if you get through at all. St. Just has actually gone to meet him—of course, no one suspects St. Just as yet; but after that . . . to get them both out of the country! I'faith, 'twill be a tough job, and tax even the ingenuity of our chief. I hope I may yet have orders to be of the party."

"Have you any special instructions for me?"

"Yes! rather more precise ones than usual. It appears that the Republican Government have sent an accredited agent over to England, a man named

Chauvelin, who is said to be terribly bitter against our league, and determined to discover the identity of our leader, so that he may have him kidnapped the next time he attempts to set foot in France. This Chauvelin has brought a whole army of spies with him, and until the chief has sampled the lot, he thinks we should meet as seldom as possible on the business of the league, and on no account should talk to each other in public places for a time. When he wants to speak to us, he will contrive to let us know."

The two young men were both bending over the fire, for the blaze had died down, and only a red glow from the dying embers cast a lurid light on a narrow semicircle in front of the hearth. The rest of the room lay buried in complete gloom; Sir Andrew had taken a pocket-book from his pocket, and drawn therefrom a paper, which he unfolded, and together they tried to read it by the dim red firelight. So intent were they upon this, so wrapt up in the cause, the business they had so much at heart, so precious was this document which came from the very hand of their adored leader, that they had eyes and ears only for that. They lost count of the sounds around them of the dropping of crisp ash from the grate, of the monotonous ticking of the clock, of the soft, almost imperceptible rustle of something on the floor close beside them. A figure had emerged from under one of the benches; with snake-like, noiseless movements it crept closer and closer to the two young men, not breathing, only gliding along the floor, in the inky blackness of the room.

"You are to read these instructions and commit them to memory," said Sir Andrew, "then destroy them."

He was about to replace the letter-case into his pocket, when a tiny slip of paper fluttered from it, and fell on to the floor. Lord Antony stooped and picked it up.

"What's that?" he asked.

"I don't know," replied Sir Andrew.

"It dropped out of your pocket just now. It certainly did not seem to be with the other paper."

"Strange!—I wonder when it got there? It is from the chief," he added, glancing at the paper.

Both stooped to try and decipher this last tiny scrap of paper on which a few words had been hastily scrawled, when suddenly a slight noise attracted their attention, which seemed to come from the passage beyond.

"What's that?" said both instinctively. Lord Antony crossed the room towards the door, which he threw open quickly and suddenly; at that very moment he received a stunning blow between the eyes, which threw him back violently into the room. Simultaneously the crouching, snake-like figure in the gloom had jumped up and hurled itself from behind upon the unsuspecting Sir Andrew, felling him to the ground.

All this occurred within the short space of two or three seconds, and before either Lord Antony or Sir Andrew had time or chance to utter a cry or to make the faintest struggle. They were each seized by two men, a muffler was quickly tied round the mouth of each, and they were pinioned to one another back to back, their arms, hands, and legs securely fastened.

One man had in the meanwhile quietly shut the door; he wore a mask and now stood motionless while the others completed their work.

"All safe, citoyen!" said one of the men, as he took a final survey of the bonds which secured the two young men.

"Good!" replied the man at the door; "now search their pockets and give me all the papers you find."

This was promptly and quietly done. The masked man having taken possession of all the papers, listened for a moment or two if there were any sound within *The Fisherman's Rest.* Evidently satisfied that this dastardly outrage had remained unheard, he once more opened the door and pointed peremptorily down the passage. The four men lifted Sir Andrew and Lord Antony from the ground, and as quietly, as noiselessly as they had come, they bore the two pinioned young gallants out of the inn and along the Dover Road into the gloom beyond.

In the coffee-room the masked leader of this daring attempt was quickly glancing through the stolen papers.

"Not a bad day's work on the whole," he muttered, as he quietly took off his mask, and his pale, fox-like eyes glittered in the red glow of the fire. "Not a bad day's work."

He opened one or two more letters from Sir Andrew Ffoulkes' pocket-book, noted the tiny scrap of paper which the two young men had only just had time to read; but one letter specially, signed Armand St. Just, seemed to give him strange satisfaction.

"Armand St. Just a traitor after all," he murmured. "Now, fair Marguerite Blakeney," he added viciously between his clenched teeth, "I think that you will help me to find the Scarlet Pimpernel."

10

IN THE OPERA BOX

It was one of the gala nights at Covent Garden Theatre, the first of the autumn season in this memorable year of grace 1792.

The house was packed, both in the smart orchestra boxes and the pit, as well as in the more plebeian balconies and galleries above. Glück's *Orpheus* made a strong appeal to the more intellectual portions of the house, whilst the fashionable women, the gaily-dressed and brilliant throng, spoke to the eye of those who cared but little for this "latest importation from Germany."

Selina Storace had been duly applauded after her grand *aria* by her numerous admirers; Benjamin Incledon, the acknowledged favourite of the ladies, had received special gracious recognition from the royal box; and now the curtain came down after the glorious finale to the second act, and the audience, which had hung spell-bound on the magic strains of the great maestro, seemed collectively to breathe a long sigh of satisfaction, previous to letting loose its hundreds of waggish and frivolous tongues.

In the smart orchestra boxes many well-known faces were to be seen. Mr. Pitt, overweighted with cares of state, was finding brief relaxation in to-night's musical treat; the Prince of Wales, jovial, rotund, somewhat coarse and commonplace in appearance, moved about from box to box, spending brief quarters of an hour with those of his more intimate friends.

In Lord Grenville's box, too, a curious, interesting personality attracted every one's attention; a thin, small figure with shrewd, sarcastic face and deep-set eyes, attentive to the music, keenly critical of the audience, dressed in immaculate black, with dark hair free from any powder. Lord Grenville—Foreign Secretary of State—paid him marked, though frigid deference.

Here and there, dotted about among distinctly English types of beauty, one or two foreign faces stood out in marked contrast: the haughty aristocratic cast of countenance of the many French royalist *émigrés* who, persecuted by the relentless, revolutionary faction of their country, had found a peaceful refuge in England. On these faces sorrow and care were deeply writ; the women especially paid but little heed, either to the music or to the brilliant audience; no doubt their thoughts were far away with husband, brother, son maybe, still in peril, or lately succumbed to a cruel fate.

Among these the Comtesse de Tournay de Basserive, but lately arrived from France, was a most conspicuous figure: dressed in deep, heavy black silk, with only a white lace kerchief to relieve the aspect of mourning about her person, she sat beside Lady Portarles, who was vainly trying by witty sallies and somewhat broad jokes to bring a smile to the Comtesse's sad mouth. Behind her sat little Suzanne and the Vicomte, both silent, and somewhat shy among so many strangers. Suzanne's eyes seemed wistful; when she first entered the crowded house, she had looked eagerly all round, scanned every face, scrutinized every box. Evidently the one face she wished to see was not there, for she settled herself down quietly behind her mother, listened apathetically to the music, and took no further interest in the audience itself.

"Ah, Lord Grenville," said Lady Portarles, as following a discreet knock, the clever, interesting head of the Secretary of State appeared in the doorway of the box, "you could not arrive more à propos. Here is Madame la Comtesse de Tournay, positively dying to hear the latest news from France."

The distinguished diplomatist had come forward and was shaking hands with the ladies.

"Alas!" he said sadly, "it is of the very worst. The massacres continue; Paris literally reeks with blood; and the guillotine claims a hundred victims a day."

Pale and tearful, the Comtesse was leaning back in her chair, listening horror-struck to this brief and graphic account of what went on in her own misguided country.

"Ah, Monsieur!" she said in broken English, "it is dreadful to hear all that—and my husband still in that awful country. It is terrible for me to be sitting here, in a theatre, all safe and in peace, whilst he is in such peril."

"Lud, Madame!" said honest, bluff Lady Portarles, "your sitting in a convent won't make your husband safe, and you have your children to consider: they are too young to be dosed with anxiety and premature mourning."

The Comtesse smiled through her tears at the vehemence of her friend. Lady Portarles, whose voice and manner would not have misfitted a jockey, had a heart of gold, and hid the most genuine sympathy and most gentle kindliness beneath the somewhat coarse manners affected by some ladies at that time.

"Besides which, Madame," added Lord Grenville, "did you not tell me yesterday that the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel had pledged their honour to bring M. le Comte safely across the Channel?"

"Ah, yes!" replied the Comtesse, "and that is my only hope. I saw Lord Hastings yesterday . . . he reassured me again."

"Then I am sure you need have no fear. What the league have sworn, that they surely will accomplish. Ah!" added the old diplomatist with a sigh, "if I were but a few years younger. . . ."

"La, man!" interrupted honest Lady Portarles, "you are still young enough to turn your back on that French scarecrow that sits enthroned in your box to-night."

"I wish I could . . . but your ladyship must remember that in serving our country we must put prejudices aside. M. Chauvelin is the accredited agent of his Government . . ."

"Odd's fish, man!" she retorted, "you don't call those bloodthirsty ruffians over there a government, do you?"

"It has not been thought advisable as yet," said the Minister guardedly, "for England to break off diplomatic relations with France, and we cannot therefore refuse to receive with courtesy the agent she wishes to send to us."

"Diplomatic relations be demmed, my lord! That sly little fox over there is nothing but a spy, I'll warrant, and you'll find—an I'm much mistaken, that he'll concern himself little with diplomacy, beyond trying to do mischief to royalist refugees—to our heroic Scarlet Pimpernel and to the members of that brave little league."

"I am sure," said the Comtesse, pursing up her thin lips, "that if this Chauvelin wishes to do us mischief, he will find a faithful ally in Lady Blakeney."

"Bless the woman!" ejaculated Lady Portales, "did ever anyone see such perversity? My Lord

Grenville, you have the gift of the gab, will you please explain to Madame la Comtesse that she is acting like a fool? In your position here in England, Madame," she added, turning a wrathful and resolute face towards the Comtesse, "you cannot afford to put on the hoity-toity airs you French aristocrats are so fond of. Lady Blakeney may or may not be in sympathy with those ruffians in France; she may or may not have had anything to do with the arrest and condemnation of St. Cyr, or whatever the man's name is, but she is the leader of fashion in this country; Sir Percy Blakeney has more money than any half-dozen other men put together, he is hand and glove with royalty, and your trying to snub Lady Blakeney will not harm her, but will make you look a fool. Isn't that so, my lord?"

But what Lord Grenville thought of this matter, or to what reflections this homely tirade of Lady Portarles led the Comtesse de Tournay, remained unspoken, for the curtain had just risen on the third act of *Orpheus*, and admonishments to silence came from every part of the house.

Lord Grenville took a hasty farewell of the ladies and slipped back into his box, where M. Chauvelin had sat all through this *entr'acte*, with his eternal snuff-box in his hand, and with his keen pale eyes intently fixed upon a box opposite to him, where, with much *frou-frou* of silken skirts, much laughter and general stir of curiosity amongst the audience, Marguerite Blakeney had just entered accompanied by her husband, and looking divinely pretty beneath the wealth of her golden, reddish curls, slightly besprinkled with powder, and tied back at the nape of her graceful neck with a gigantic black bow. Always dressed in the very latest vagary of fashion, Marguerite alone among the ladies that night had discarded the cross-over fichu and broad-lapelled over-dress, which had been in fashion for the last two or three years. She wore the short-waisted classical-shaped gown, which so soon was to become the approved mode in every country in Europe. It suited her graceful, regal figure to perfection, composed as it was of shimmering stuff which seemed a mass of rich gold embroidery.

As she entered, she leant for a moment out of the box, taking stock of all those present whom she knew. Many bowed to her as she did so, and from the royal box there came also a quick and gracious salute.

Chauvelin watched her intently all through the commencement of the third act, as she sat enthralled with the music, her exquisite little hand toying with a small jewelled fan, her regal head, her throat, arms and neck, covered with magnificent diamonds and rare gems, the gift of the adoring husband who sprawled leisurely by her side.

Marguerite was passionately fond of music. *Orpheus* charmed her to-night. The very joy of living was writ plainly upon the sweet young face, it sparkled out of the merry blue eyes and lit up the smile that lurked around the lips. She was after all but five-and-twenty, in the heyday of youth, the darling of a brilliant throng, adored, fêted, petted, cherished. Two days ago the *Day Dream* had returned from Calais, bringing her news that her idolized brother had safely landed, that he thought of her, and would be prudent for her sake.

What wonder for the moment, and listening to Glück's impassioned strains, that she forgot her disillusionments, forgot her vanished love-dreams, forgot even the lazy, good-humoured nonentity who had made up for his lack of spiritual attainments by lavishing worldly advantages upon her.

He had stayed beside her in the box just as long as convention demanded, making way for His Royal Highness and for the host of admirers who in a continued procession came to pay homage to the queen of fashion. Sir Percy had strolled away, to talk to more congenial friends probably. Marguerite did not even wonder whither he had gone—she cared so little; she had had a little court round her, composed of the *jeunesse dorée* of London, and had just dismissed them all, wishing to be alone with Glück for a brief while.

A discreet knock at the door roused her from her enjoyment.

"Come in," she said with some impatience, without turning to look at the intruder.

Chauvelin, waiting for his opportunity, noted that she was alone, and now, without pausing for that impatient "Come in," he quietly slipped into the box, and the next moment was standing behind Marguerite's chair.

"A word with you, citoyenne," he said quietly.

Marguerite turned quickly, in alarm, which was not altogether feigned.

"Lud, man! you frightened me," she said with a forced little laugh, "your presence is entirely inopportune. I want to listen to Glück, and have no mind for talking."

"But this is my only opportunity," he said, as quietly and without waiting for permission he drew a chair close behind her—so close that he could whisper in her ear, without disturbing the audience, and without being seen, in the dark background of the box. "This is my only opportunity," he repeated, as she vouchsafed him no reply, "Lady Blakeney is always so surrounded, so fêted by her court, that a mere old friend has but very little chance."

"Faith, man!" she said impatiently, "you must seek for another opportunity then. I am going to Lord Grenville's ball to-night after the opera. So are you, probably. I'll give you five minutes then . . ."

"Three minutes in the privacy of this box are quite sufficient for me," he rejoined placidly, "and I think that you would be wise to listen to me, Citoyenne St. Just."

Marguerite instinctively shivered. Chauvelin had not raised his voice above a whisper; he was now quietly taking a pinch of snuff, yet there was something in his attitude, something in those pale, foxy eyes, which seemed to freeze the blood in her veins, as would the sight of some deadly hitherto unguessed peril.

"Is that a threat, citoyen?" she asked at last.

"Nay, fair lady," he said gallantly, "only an arrow shot into the air."

He paused a moment, like a cat which sees a mouse running heedlessly by, ready to spring, yet waiting with that feline sense of enjoyment of mischief about to be done. Then he said quietly—

"Your brother, St. Just, is in peril."

Not a muscle moved in the beautiful face before him. He could only see it in profile, for Marguerite seemed to be watching the stage intently, but Chauvelin was a keen observer; he noticed the sudden rigidity of the eyes, the hardening of the mouth, the sharp, almost paralysed tension of the beautiful, graceful figure.

"Lud, then," she said, with affected merriment, "since 'tis one of your imaginary plots, you'd best go back to your own seat and leave me to enjoy the music."

And with her hand she began to beat time nervously against the cushion of the box. Selina Storace was singing the "Che faro" to an audience that hung spellbound upon the prima donna's lips. Chauvelin did not move from his seat; he quietly watched that tiny nervous hand, the only indication that his shaft had indeed struck home.

"Well?" she said suddenly and irrelevantly, and with the same feigned unconcern.

"Well, citoyenne?" he rejoined placidly.

"About my brother?"

"I have news of him for you which, I think, will interest you, but first let me explain. . . . May I?"

The question was unnecessary. He felt, though Marguerite still held her head steadily averted from him, that her every nerve was strained to hear what he had to say.

"The other day, citoyenne," he said, "I asked for your help. . . . France needed it, and I thought I could rely on you, but you gave me your answer. . . . Since then the exigencies of my own affairs and your own social duties have kept us apart . . . although many things have happened. . . ."

"To the point, I pray you, citoyen," she said lightly; "the music is entrancing, and the audience will get impatient of your talk."

"One moment, citoyenne. The day on which I had the honour of meeting you at Dover, and less than an hour after I had your final answer, I obtained possession of some papers which revealed another of those subtle schemes for the escape of a batch of French aristocrats—that traitor de Tournay amongst others—all organized by that arch-meddler, the Scarlet Pimpernel. Some of the threads, too, of this mysterious organization have fallen into my hands, but not all, and I want you—nay! you *must* help me to gather them together."

Marguerite seemed to have listened to him with marked impatience; she now shrugged her shoulders and said gaily—

"Bah, man. Have I not already told you that I care nought about your schemes or about the Scarlet Pimpernel? And had you not spoken about my brother . . ."

"A little patience, I entreat, citoyenne," he continued imperturbably. "Two gentlemen, Lord Antony Dewhurst and Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, were at *The Fisherman's Rest* at Dover that same night."

"I know. I saw them there."

"They were already known to my spies as members of that accursed league. It was Sir Andrew Ffoulkes who escorted the Comtesse de Tournay and her children across the Channel. When the two young men were alone, my spies forced their way into the coffee-room of the inn, gagged and pinioned the two gallants, seized their papers, and brought them to me."

In a moment she had guessed the danger. Papers? . . . Had Armand been imprudent? . . . The very thought struck her with nameless terror. Still she would not let this man see that she feared; she laughed gaily and lightly.

"Faith! and your impudence passes belief," she said merrily. "Robbery and violence!—in England!—in a crowded inn! Your men might have been caught in the act!"

"What if they had? They are children of France, and have been trained by your humble servant. Had they been caught they would have gone to jail, or even to the gallows, without a word of protest or indiscretion; at any rate it was well worth the risk. A crowded inn is safer for these little operations than you think, and my men have experience."

"Well? And those papers?" she asked carelessly.

"Unfortunately, though they have given me cognizance of certain names . . . certain movements . . . enough, I think, to thwart their projected coup for the moment, it would only be for the moment, and still leaves me in ignorance of the identity of the Scarlet Pimpernel."

"La! my friend," she said, with the same assumed flippancy of manner, "then you are where you were before, aren't you? and you can let me enjoy the last strophe of the aria. Faith!" she added, ostentatiously smothering an imaginary yawn, "had you not spoken about my brother . . ."

"I am coming to him now, citoyenne. Among the papers there was a letter to Sir Andrew Ffoulkes written by your brother, St. Just."

"Well? And?"

"That letter shows him to be not only in sympathy with the enemies of France, but actually a helper, if not a member, of the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel."

The blow had been struck at last. All along, Marguerite had been expecting it; she would not show fear, she was determined to seem unconcerned, flippant even. She wished, when the shock came, to be prepared for it, to have all her wits about her—those wits which had been nicknamed the keenest in Europe. Even now she did not flinch. She knew that Chauvelin had spoken the truth; the man was too earnest, too blindly devoted to the misguided cause he had at heart, too proud of his countrymen, of those makers of revolutions, to stoop to low, purposeless falsehoods.

That letter of Armand's—foolish, imprudent Armand—was in Chauvelin's hands. Marguerite knew that as well as if she had seen the letter with her own eyes; and Chauvelin would hold that letter for purposes of his own until it suited him to destroy it or to make use of it against Armand. All that she knew, and yet she continued to laugh more gaily, more loudly than she had done before.

"La, man!" she said, speaking over her shoulder and looking him full and squarely in the face, "did I not say it was some imaginary plot. . . . Armand in league with that enigmatic Scarlet Pimpernel! . . . Armand busy helping those French aristocrats whom he despises! . . . Faith, the tale does infinite credit to your imagination!"

"Let me make my point clear, citoyenne," said Chauvelin, with the same unruffled calm, "I must assure you that St. Just is compromised beyond the slightest hope of pardon."

Inside the orchestra box all was silent for a moment or two. Marguerite sat, straight upright, rigid and inert, trying to think, trying to face the situation, to realize what had best be done.

In the house Storace had finished the *aria*, and was even now bowing in her classic garb, but in approved eighteenth-century fashion, to the enthusiastic audience, who cheered her to the echo.

"Chauvelin," said Marguerite Blakeney at last, quietly and without that touch of bravado which had characterized her attitude all along, "Chauvelin, my friend, shall we try to understand one another. It seems that my wits have become rusty by contact with this damp climate. Now, tell me, you are very anxious to discover the identity of the Scarlet Pimpernel, isn't that so?"

"France's most bitter enemy, citoyenne . . . all the more dangerous, as he works in the dark."

"All the more noble, you mean. . . . Well!—and you would now force me to do some spying work for you in exchange for my brother Armand's safety?—Is that it?"

"Fie! two very ugly words, fair lady," protested Chauvelin urbanely. "There can be no question of force, and the service which I would ask of you, in the name of France, could never be called by the shocking name of spying."

"At any rate, that is what it is called over here," she said drily. "That is your intention, is it not?"

"My intention is, that you yourself win a free pardon for Armand St. Just by doing me a small service."

"What is it?"

"Only watch for me to-night, Citoyenne St. Just," he said eagerly. "Listen: among the papers which were found about the person of Sir Andrew Ffoulkes there was a tiny note. See!" he added, taking a tiny scrap of paper from his pocket-book and handing it to her.

It was the same scrap of paper which, four days ago, the two young men had been in the act of reading, at the very moment when they were attacked by Chauvelin's minions. Marguerite took it mechanically and stooped to read it. There were only two lines, written in a distorted, evidently disguised, handwriting; she read them half aloud—

"Remember we must not meet more often than is strictly necessary. You have all instructions for the

2nd. If you wish to speak to me again, I shall be at G.'s ball."

"What does it mean?" she asked.

"Look again, citoyenne, and you will understand."

"There is a device here in the corner, a small red flower . . ."

"Yes."

"The Scarlet Pimpernel," she said eagerly, "and G.'s ball means Grenville's ball. . . . He will be at my Lord Grenville's ball to-night."

"That is how I interpret the note, citoyenne," concluded Chauvelin blandly. "Lord Antony Dewhurst and Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, after they were pinioned and searched by my spies, were carried by my orders to a lonely house on the Dover Road, which I had rented for the purpose: there they remained close prisoners until this morning. But having found this tiny scrap of paper, my intention was that they should be in London in time to attend my Lord Grenville's ball. You see, do you not? that they must have a great deal to say to their chief . . . and thus they will have an opportunity of speaking to him to-night, just as he directed them to do. Therefore, this morning, those two young gallants found every bar and bolt open in that lonely house on the Dover Road, their jailers disappeared, and two good horses standing ready saddled and tethered in the yard. I have not seen them yet, but I think we may safely conclude that they did not draw rein until they reached London. Now you see how simple it all is, citoyenne!"

"It does seem simple, doesn't it?" she said, with a final bitter attempt at flippancy, "when you want to kill a chicken . . . you take hold of it . . . then you wring its neck . . . it's only the chicken who does not find it quite so simple. Now you hold a knife at my throat, and a hostage for my obedience. . . . You find it simple. . . . I don't."

"Nay, citoyenne, I offer you a chance of saving the brother you love from the consequences of his own folly."

Marguerite's face softened, her eyes at last grew moist, as she murmured, half to herself—

"The only being in the world who has loved me truly and constantly. . . . But what do you want me to do, Chauvelin?" she said, with a world of despair in her tear-choked voice. "In my present position, it is wellnigh impossible!"

"Nay, citoyenne," he said drily and relentlessly, not heeding that despairing, childlike appeal, which might have melted a heart of stone, "as Lady Blakeney, no one suspects you, and with your help to-night I may—who knows?—succeed in finally establishing the identity of the Scarlet Pimpernel. . . . You are going to the ball anon. . . . Watch for me there, citoyenne, watch and listen. . . . You can tell me if you hear a chance word or whisper. . . . You can note every one to whom Sir Andrew Ffoulkes or Lord Antony Dewhurst will speak. You are absolutely beyond suspicion now. The Scarlet Pimpernel will be at Lord Grenville's ball to-night. Find out who he is, and I will pledge the word of France that your brother shall be safe."

Chauvelin was putting the knife to her throat. Marguerite felt herself entangled in one of those webs from which she could hope for no escape. A precious hostage was being held for her obedience: for she knew that this man would never make an empty threat. No doubt Armand was already signalled to the Committee of Public Safety as one of the "suspect"; he would not be allowed to leave France again, and would be ruthlessly struck, if she refused to obey Chauvelin. For a moment—woman like—she still hoped to temporize. She held out her hand to this man, whom she now feared and hated.

"If I promise to help you in this matter, Chauvelin," she said pleasantly, "will you give me that letter of St. Just's?"

"If you render me useful assistance to-night, citoyenne," he replied with a sarcastic smile, "I will give you that letter . . . to-morrow."

"You do not trust me?"

"I trust you absolutely, dear lady, but St. Just's life is forfeit to his country . . . it rests with you to redeem it."

"I may be powerless to help you," she pleaded, "were I ever so willing."

"That would be terrible indeed," he said quietly, "for you . . . and for St. Just."

Marguerite shuddered. She felt that from this man she could expect no mercy. All-powerful, he held the beloved life in the hollow of his hand. She knew him too well not to know that, if he failed in gaining his own ends, he would be pitiless.

She felt cold in spite of the oppressive air of the opera-house. The heart-appealing strains of the music seemed to reach her, as from a distant land. She drew her costly lace scarf up around her shoulders, and sat silently watching the brilliant scene, as if in a dream.

For a moment her thoughts wandered away from the loved one who was in danger, to that other man who also had a claim on her confidence and her affection. She felt lonely, frightened for Armand's sake; she longed to seek comfort and advice from some one who would know how to help and console. Sir Percy Blakeney had loved her once; he was her husband; why should she stand alone through this terrible ordeal? He had very little brains, it is true, but he had plenty of muscle; surely, if she provided the thought, and he the manly energy and pluck, together they could outwit the astute diplomatist, and save the hostage from his vengeful hands without imperilling the life of the noble leader of that gallant little band of heroes. Sir Percy knew St. Just well—he seemed attached to him—she was sure that he could help.

Chauvelin was taking no further heed of her. He had said his cruel "Either—or——" and left her to decide. He, in his turn now, appeared to be absorbed in the soul-stirring melodies of *Orpheus*, and was beating time to the music with his sharp, ferret-like head.

A discreet rap at the door roused Marguerite from her thoughts. It was Percy Blakeney, tall, sleepy, good-humoured, and wearing that half-shy, half-inane smile, which just now seemed to irritate her every nerve.

"Er . . . your chair is outside . . . m'dear," he said, with his most exasperating drawl, "I suppose you will want to go to that demmed ball. . . . Excuse me—er—Monsieur Chauvelin—I had not observed you. . . ."

He extended two slender, white fingers towards Chauvelin, who had risen when Sir Percy entered the box.

"Are you coming, m'dear?"

"Hush! Sh! Sh!" came in angry remonstrance from different parts of the house.

"Demmed impudence," commented Sir Percy with a good-natured smile.

Marguerite sighed impatiently. Her last hope seemed suddenly to have vanished away. She wrapped her cloak round her and, without looking at her husband, "I am ready to go," she said, taking his arm. At the door of the box she turned and looked straight at Chauvelin, who, with his *chapeau-bras* under his arm, and a curious smile round his thin lips was preparing to follow the strangely ill-assorted couple.

"It is only au revoir, Chauvelin," she said pleasantly, "we shall meet at my Lord Grenville's ball, anon."

And in her eyes the astute Frenchman read, no doubt, something which caused him profound satisfaction, for with a sarcastic smile, he took a delicate pinch of snuff, then, having dusted his dainty lace jabot, he rubbed his thin, bony hands contentedly together.

11

LORD GRENVILLE'S BALL

THE historic ball given by the then Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs—Lord Grenville—was the most brilliant function of the year. Though the autumn season had only just begun, everybody who was anybody had contrived to be in London in time to be present there, and to shine at this ball to the best of his or her respective ability.

His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales had promised to be present. He was coming on presently from the opera. Lord Grenville himself had listened to the two first acts of *Orpheus*, before preparing to receive his guests. At ten o'clock—an unusually late hour in those days—the grand rooms of the Foreign Office, exquisitely decorated with exotic palms and flowers, were filled to overflowing. One room had been set apart for dancing, and the dainty strains of the minuet made a soft accompaniment to the gay chatter, the merry laughter of the numerous and brilliant company.

In a small chamber, facing the top of the fine stairway, the distinguished host stood ready to receive his guests. Distinguished men, beautiful women, notabilities from every European country, had already filed past him, had exchanged the elaborate bows and curtsies with him, which the extravagant fashion of the time demanded, and then, laughing and talking, had dispersed in the ball- reception- and card-rooms beyond.

Not far from Lord Grenville's elbow, leaning against one of the console tables, Chauvelin, in his irreproachable black costume, was taking a quiet survey of the brilliant throng. He noted that Sir Percy and Lady Blakeney had not yet arrived, and his keen, pale eyes glanced quickly towards the door every time a new-comer appeared.

He stood somewhat isolated: the envoy of the Revolutionary Government of France was not likely to be very popular in England at a time when the news of the awful September massacres, and of the Reign of Terror and Anarchy, had just begun to filtrate across the Channel.

In his official capacity he had been received courteously by his English colleagues: Mr. Pitt had shaken him by the hand; Lord Grenville had entertained him more than once; but the more intimate circles of London society ignored him altogether; the women openly turned their backs upon him; the men who held no official position refused to shake his hand.

But Chauvelin was not the man to trouble himself about these social amenities, which he called mere incidents in his diplomatic career. He was blindly enthusiastic for the revolutionary cause, he despised all social inequalities, and he had a burning love for his own country; these three sentiments made him supremely indifferent to the snubs he received in this fog-ridden, loyalist, old-fashioned England.

But, above all, Chauvelin had a purpose at heart. He firmly believed that the French aristocrat was the most bitter enemy of France; he would have wished to see every one of them annihilated: he was one of those who, during this awful Reign of Terror, had been the first to utter the historic and ferocious desire "that aristocrats might have but one head between them, so that it might be cut off with a single stroke of the guillotine." And thus he looked upon every French aristocrat, who had succeeded in escaping from France, as so much prey of which the guillotine had been unwarrantably cheated. There is no doubt that those royalist *émigrés*, once they had managed to cross the frontier, did their very best to stir up foreign indignation against France. Plots without end were hatched in England, in Belgium, in Holland, to try and induce some great Power to send troops into revolutionary Paris, to free King Louis, and to summarily hang the bloodthirsty leaders of that monster republic.

Small wonder, therefore, that the romantic and mysterious personality of the Scarlet Pimpernel was a source of bitter hatred to Chauvelin. He and the few young jackanapes under his command, well furnished with money, armed with boundless daring, and acute cunning, had succeeded in rescuing hundreds of aristocrats from France. Nine-tenths of the *émigrés* who were fêted at the English court owed their safety to that man and to his league.

Chauvelin had sworn to his colleagues in Paris that he would discover the identity of that meddlesome Englishman, entice him over to France, and then . . . Chauvelin drew a deep breath of satisfaction at the very thought of seeing that enigmatic head falling under the knife of the guillotine, as easily as that of any other man.

Suddenly there was a great stir on the handsome staircase, all conversation stopped for a moment as the major-domo's voice outside announced—

"His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales and suite, Sir Percy Blakeney, Lady Blakeney."

Lord Grenville went quickly to the door to receive his exalted guest.

The Prince of Wales, dressed in a magnificent court suit of salmon-coloured velvet richly embroidered with gold, entered with Marguerite Blakeney on his arm; and on his left Sir Percy, in gorgeous shimmering cream satin, cut in the extravagant "Incroyable" style, his fair hair free from powder, priceless lace at his neck and wrists, and the flat *chapeau-bras* under his arm.

After the few conventional words of deferential greeting, Lord Grenville said to his royal guest—

"Will your Highness permit me to introduce M. Chauvelin, the accredited agent of the French Government?"

Chauvelin, immediately the Prince entered, had stepped forward, expecting this introduction. He bowed very low, whilst the Prince returned his salute with a curt nod of the head.

"Monsieur," said His Royal Highness coldly, "we will try to forget the Government that sent you, and look upon you merely as our guest—a private gentleman from France. As such you are welcome, Monsieur."

"Monseigneur," rejoined Chauvelin, bowing once again. "Madame," he added, bowing ceremoniously before Marguerite.

"Ah! my little Chauvelin!" she said with unconcerned gaiety and extending her tiny hand to him. "Monsieur and I are old friends, your Royal Highness."

"Ah, then," said the Prince, this time very graciously, "you are doubly welcome, Monsieur."

"There is some one else I would crave permission to present to your Royal Highness," here interposed Lord Grenville.

"Ah! who is it?" asked the Prince.

"Madame la Comtesse de Tournay de Basserive and her family, who have but recently come from France."

"By all means!—They are among the lucky ones then!"

Lord Grenville turned in search of the Comtesse, who sat at the further end of the room.

"Lud love me!" whispered His Royal Highness to Marguerite, as soon as he had caught sight of the rigid figure of the old lady; "Lud love me! she looks very virtuous and very melancholy."

"Faith, your Royal Highness," she rejoined with a smile, "virtue is like precious odours, most fragrant when it is crushed."

"Virtue, alas!" sighed the Prince, "is mostly unbecoming to your charming sex, Madame."

"Madame la Comtesse de Tournay de Basserive," said Lord Grenville, introducing the lady.

"This is a pleasure, Madame; my royal father, as you know, is ever glad to welcome those of your compatriots whom France has driven from her shores."

"Your Royal Highness is ever gracious," replied the Comtesse with becoming dignity. Then, indicating her daughter, who stood timidly by her side: "My daughter Suzanne, Monseigneur," she said.

"Ah! charming!—charming!" said the Prince, "and now allow me, Comtesse, to introduce to you Lady Blakeney, who honours us with her friendship. You and she will have much to say to one another, I vow. Every compatriot of Lady Blakeney's is doubly welcome for her sake . . . her friends are our friends . . . her enemies, the enemies of England."

Marguerite's blue eyes had twinkled with merriment at this gracious speech from her exalted friend. The Comtesse de Tournay, who lately had so flagrantly insulted her, was here receiving a public lesson, at which Marguerite could not help but rejoice. But the Comtesse, for whom respect for royalty amounted almost to a religion, was too well schooled in courtly etiquette to show the slightest sign of embarrassment, as the two ladies curtsied ceremoniously to one another.

"His Royal Highness is ever gracious, Madame," said Marguerite, demurely, and with a wealth of mischief in her twinkling blue eyes, "but here there is no need for his kind mediation. . . . Your amiable reception of me at our last meeting still dwells pleasantly in my memory."

"We poor exiles, Madame," rejoined the Comtesse, frigidly, "show our gratitude to England by devotion to the wishes of Monseigneur."

"Madame!" said Marguerite, with another ceremonious curtsy.

"Madame," responded the Comtesse with equal dignity.

The Prince in the meanwhile was saying a few gracious words to the young Vicomte.

"I am happy to know you, Monsieur le Vicomte," he said. "I knew your father well when he was ambassador in London."

"Ah, Monseigneur!" replied the Vicomte, "I was a leetle boy then . . . and now I owe the honour of this meeting to our protector, the Scarlet Pimpernel."

"Hush!" said the Prince, earnestly and quickly, as he indicated Chauvelin, who had stood a little on one side throughout the whole of this little scene, watching Marguerite and the Comtesse with an amused sarcastic little smile around his thin lips.

"Nay, Monseigneur," he said now, as if in direct response to the Prince's challenge, "pray do not check this gentleman's display of gratitude; the name of that interesting red flower is well known to me—and to France."

The Prince looked at him keenly for a moment or two.

"Faith, then, Monsieur," he said, "perhaps you know more about our national hero than we do ourselves . . . perchance you know who he is . . . See!" he added, turning to the groups round the room, "the ladies hang upon your lips . . . you would render yourself popular among the fair sex if you were to gratify their curiosity."

"Ah, Monseigneur," said Chauvelin, significantly, "rumour has it in France that your Highness could—and you would—give the truest account of that enigmatical wayside flower!"

He looked quickly and keenly at Marguerite as he spoke; but she betrayed no emotion, and her eyes met his quite fearlessly.

"Nay, man," replied the Prince, "my lips are sealed! and the members of the league jealously guard the secret of their chief . . . so his fair adorers have to be content with worshipping a shadow. Here in England, Monsieur," he added, with wonderful charm and dignity, "we but name the Scarlet Pimpernel, and every fair cheek is suffused with a blush of enthusiasm. None have seen him save his faithful lieutenants. We know not if he be tall or short, fair or dark, handsome or ill-formed; but we know that he is the bravest gentleman in all the world, and we all feel a little proud, Monsieur, when we remember that he is an Englishman."

"Ah, Monsieur Chauvelin," added Marguerite, looking almost with defiance across at the placid, sphinx-like face of the Frenchman, "His Royal Highness should add that we ladies think of him as of a hero of old . . . we worship him . . . we wear his badge . . . we tremble for him when he is in danger, and exult with him in the hour of his victory."

Chauvelin did no more than bow placidly both to the Prince and to Marguerite; he felt that both speeches were intended—each in their way—to convey contempt or defiance. The pleasure-loving, idle Prince he despised; the beautiful woman, who in her golden hair wore a spray of small red flowers composed of rubies and diamonds—her he held in the hollow of his hand: he could afford to remain silent and to await events.

A long, jovial, inane laugh broke the sudden silence which had fallen over every one.

"And we poor husbands," came in slow affected accents from gorgeous Sir Percy, "we have to stand by . . . while they worship a demmed shadow."

Every one laughed—the Prince more loudly than anyone. The tension of subdued excitement was relieved, and the next moment every one was laughing and chatting merrily as the gay crowd broke up and dispersed in the adjoining rooms.

12

THE SCRAP OF PAPER

MARGUERITE suffered intensely. Though she laughed and chatted, though she was more admired, more surrounded, more fêted than any woman there, she felt like one condemned to death, living her last day upon this earth.

Her nerves were in a state of painful tension, which had increased a hundredfold during that brief hour which she had spent in her husband's company between the opera and the ball. The short ray of hope—that she might find in this good-natured, lazy individual a valuable friend and adviser—had vanished as quickly as it had come, the moment she found herself alone with him. The same feeling of good-humoured contempt which one feels for an animal or a faithful servant made her turn away with a smile from the man who should have been her moral support in this heart-rending crisis through which she was passing: who should have been her cool-headed adviser when feminine sympathy and sentiment tossed her hither and thither, between her love for her brother, who was far away and in mortal peril, and horror of the awful service which Chauvelin had exacted from her, in exchange for Armand's safety.

There he stood, the moral support, the cool-headed adviser, surrounded by a crowd of brainless, empty-headed young fops, who were even now repeating from mouth to mouth, and with every sign of the keenest enjoyment, a doggerel couplet which he had just given forth.

Everywhere the absurd, silly words met her; people seemed to have little else to speak about; even the Prince had asked her, with a laugh, whether she appreciated her husband's latest poetic efforts.

"All done in the tying of a cravat," Sir Percy had declared to his clique of admirers.

We seek him here, we seek him there,
Those Frenchies seek him everywhere.
Is he in heaven?—Is he in hell?
That demmed, elusive Pimpernel.

Sir Percy's *bon mot* had gone the round of the brilliant reception-rooms. The Prince was enchanted. He vowed that life without Blakeney would be but a dreary desert. Then, taking him by the arm, he had led him to the card-room, and engaged him in a long game of hazard.

Sir Percy, whose chief interest in most social gatherings seemed to centre round the card-table, usually allowed his wife to flirt, dance, to amuse or bore herself as much as she liked. And to-night, having delivered himself of his *bon mot*, he had left Marguerite surrounded by a crowd of admirers of all ages, all anxious and willing to help her to forget that somewhere in the spacious reception-rooms there was a long, lazy being who had been fool enough to suppose that the cleverest woman in Europe would settle down to the prosaic bonds of English matrimony.

Her still over-wrought nerves, her excitement and agitation, lent beautiful Marguerite Blakeney much additional charm: escorted by a veritable bevy of men of all ages and of most nationalities, she called forth many exclamations of admiration from every one as she passed.

She would not allow herself any more time to think. Her early, somewhat Bohemian training had made her something of a fatalist. She felt that events would shape themselves, that the directing of them was not in her hands. From Chauvelin she knew that she could expect no mercy. He had set a price upon Armand's head, and left it to her to pay or not, as she chose.

Later on in the evening she caught sight of Sir Andrew Ffoulkes and Lord Antony Dewhurst, who seemingly had just arrived. She noticed at once that Sir Andrew immediately made for little Suzanne de Tournay, and that the two young people soon managed to isolate themselves in one of the deep embrasures of the mullioned windows, there to carry on a long conversation, which seemed very earnest and very pleasant on both sides.

Both the young men looked a little haggard and anxious, but otherwise they were irreproachably dressed, and there was not the slightest sign, about their courtly demeanour, of the terrible catastrophe which they must have felt hovering round them and round their chief.

That the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel had no intention of abandoning its cause, she had gathered through little Suzanne herself, who spoke openly of the assurance she and her mother had had that the Comte de Tournay would be rescued from France by the league, within the next few days. Vaguely she began to wonder, as she looked at the brilliant and fashionable crowd in the gaily-lighted ball-room, which of these wordly men round her was the mysterious "Scarlet Pimpernel," who held the threads of such daring plots, and the fate of valuable lives in his hand.

A burning curiosity seized her to know him: although for months she had heard of him and had accepted his anonymity, as every one else in society had done; but now she longed to know—quite impersonally, quite apart from Armand, and oh! quite apart from Chauvelin—only for her own sake, for the sake of the enthusiastic admiration she had always bestowed on his bravery and cunning.

He was at the ball, of course, somewhere, since Sir Andrew Ffoulkes and Lord Antony Dewhurst were here, evidently expecting to meet their chief—and perhaps to get a fresh *mot d'ordre* from him.

Marguerite looked round at every one, at the aristocratic high-typed Norman faces, the squarely-built, fair-haired Saxon, the more gentle, humorous cast of the Celt, wondering which of these betrayed the power, the energy, the cunning which had imposed its will and its leadership upon a number of high-born English gentlemen, among whom rumour asserted was His Royal Highness himself.

Sir Andrew Ffoulkes? Surely not, with his gentle blue eyes, which were looking so tenderly and longingly after little Suzanne, who was being led away from the pleasant *tête-à-tête* by her stern mother. Marguerite watched him across the room, as he finally turned away with a sigh, and seemed to stand, aimless and lonely, now that Suzanne's dainty little figure had disappeared in the crowd.

She watched him as he strolled towards the doorway, which led to a small boudoir beyond, then paused and leaned against the framework of it, looking still anxiously all round him.

Marguerite contrived for the moment to evade her present attentive cavalier, and she skirted the fashionable crowd, drawing nearer to the doorway against which Sir Andrew was leaning. Why she wished to get closer to him, she could not have said: perhaps she was impelled by an all-powerful fatality, which so often seems to rule the destinies of men.

Suddenly she stopped: her very heart seemed to stand still, her eyes, large and excited, flashed for a moment towards that doorway, then as quickly were turned away again. Sir Andrew Ffoulkes was still in the same listless position by the door, but Marguerite had distinctly seen that Lord Hastings—a young buck, a friend of her husband's and one of the Prince's set—had, as he quickly brushed past him, slipped something into his hand.

For one moment longer—oh! it was the merest flash—Marguerite paused: the next she had, with admirably played unconcern, resumed her walk across the room—but this time more quickly towards that doorway whence Sir Andrew had now disappeared.

All this, from the moment that Marguerite had caught sight of Sir Andrew leaning against the doorway, until she followed him into the little boudoir beyond, had occurred in less than a minute. Fate is usually swift when she deals a blow.

Now Lady Blakeney had suddenly ceased to exist. It was Marguerite St. Just who was there only: Marguerite St. Just, who had passed her childhood, her early youth, in the protecting arms of her brother Armand. She had forgotten everything else—her rank, her dignity, her secret enthusiasms—everything save that Armand stood in peril of his life, and that there, not twenty feet away from her, in the small boudoir which was quite deserted, in the very hands of Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, might be the talisman which would save her brother's life.

Barely another thirty seconds had elapsed between the moment when Lord Hastings slipped the mysterious "something" into Sir Andrew's hand, and the one when she, in her turn, reached the deserted boudoir. Sir Andrew was standing with his back to her and close to a table upon which stood a massive silver candelabra. A slip of paper was in his hand, and he was in the very act of perusing its contents.

Unperceived, her soft clinging robe making not the slightest sound upon the heavy carpet, not daring to breathe until she had accomplished her purpose, Marguerite slipped close behind him. . . . At that moment he looked round and saw her; she uttered a groan, passed her hand across her forehead, and murmured faintly—

"The heat in the room was terrible . . . I felt so faint. . . . Ah! . . ."

She tottered almost as if she would fall, and Sir Andrew, quickly recovering himself, and crumpling in his hand the tiny note he had been reading, was only, apparently, just in time to support her.

"You are ill, Lady Blakeney?" he asked with much concern. "Let me . . ."

"No, no, nothing——" she interrupted quickly. "A chair—quick."

She sank into a chair close to the table, and throwing back her head, closed her eyes.

"There!" she murmured, still faintly; "the giddiness is passing off. . . . Do not heed me, Sir Andrew; I assure you I already feel better."

At moments like these there is no doubt—and psychologists actually assert it—that there is in us a sense which has absolutely nothing to do with the other five: it is not that we see, it is not that we hear or touch, yet we seem to do all three at once. Marguerite sat there with her eyes apparently closed. Sir Andrew was immediately behind her, and on her right was the table with the five-armed candelabra upon it. Before her mental vision there was absolutely nothing but Armand's face. Armand, whose life was in the most imminent danger, and who seemed to be looking at her from a background upon which was dimly painted the seething crowd of Paris, the bare walls of the Tribunal of Public Safety, with Foucquier Tinville, the Public Prosecutor, demanding Armand's life in the name of the people of France, and the lurid guillotine with its stained knife waiting for another victim . . . Armand! . . .

For one moment there was dead silence in the little boudoir. Beyond from the brilliant ball-room, the sweet notes of the gavotte, the *frou-frou* of rich dresses, the talk and laughter of a large and merry crowd, came as a strange, weird accompaniment to the drama which was being enacted here.

Sir Andrew had not uttered another word. Then it was that that extra sense became potent in Marguerite Blakeney. She could not see, for her eyes were closed; she could not hear, for the noise from the ball-room drowned the soft rustle of that momentous scrap of paper; nevertheless she knew—as if she had both seen and heard—that Sir Andrew was even now holding the paper to the flame of one of the candles.

At the exact moment that it began to catch fire, she opened her eyes, raised her hand and, with two dainty fingers, had taken the burning scrap of paper from the young man's hand. Then she blew out the flame, and held the paper to her nostril with perfect unconcern.

"How thoughtful of you, Sir Andrew," she said gaily, "surely 'twas your grandmother who taught you that the smell of burnt paper was a sovereign remedy against giddiness."

She sighed with satisfaction, holding the paper tightly between her jewelled fingers; that talisman which perhaps would save her brother Armand's life. Sir Andrew was staring at her, too dazed for the moment to realize what had actually happened; he had been taken so completely by surprise, that he seemed quite unable to grasp the fact that the slip of paper, which she held in her dainty hand, was one perhaps on which the life of his comrade might depend.

Marguerite burst into a long, merry peal of laughter.

"Why do you stare at me like that?" she said playfully. "I assure you I feel much better; your remedy has proved most effectual. This room is most delightfully cool," she added, with the same perfect composure, "and the sound of the gavotte from the ballroom is fascinating and soothing."

She was prattling on in the most unconcerned and pleasant way, whilst Sir Andrew, in an agony of mind, was racking his brains as to the quickest method he could employ to get that bit of paper out of that beautiful woman's hand. Instinctively, vague and tumultuous thoughts rushed through his mind: he suddenly remembered her nationality, and, worst of all, recollected that horrible tale anent the Marquis de St. Cyr, which in England no one had credited, for the sake of Sir Percy, as well as for her own.

"What? Still dreaming and staring?" she said, with a merry laugh, "you are most ungallant, Sir

Andrew; and now I come to think of it, you seemed more startled than pleased when you saw me just now. I do believe, after all, that it was not concern for my health, nor yet a remedy taught you by your grandmother that caused you to burn this tiny scrap of paper. . . . I vow it must have been your lady love's last cruel epistle you were trying to destroy. Now confess!" she added, playfully holding up the scrap of paper, "does this contain her final congé, or a last appeal to kiss and make friends?"

"Whichever it is, Lady Blakeney," said Sir Andrew, who was gradually recovering his self-possession, "this little note is undoubtedly mine, and . . ."

Not caring whether his action was one that would be styled ill-bred towards a lady, the young man had made a bold dash for the note; but Marguetite's thoughts flew quicker than his own; her actions, under pressure of this intense excitement, were swifter and more sure. She was tall and strong; she took a quick step backwards and knocked over the small Sheraton table which was already top-heavy, and which fell down with a crash, together with the massive candelabra upon it.

She gave a quick cry of alarm—

"The candles, Sir Andrew—quick!"

There was not much damage done; one or two of the candles had blown out as the candelabra fell; others had merely sent some grease upon the valuable carpet; one had ignited the paper shade over it. Sir Andrew quickly and dexterously put out the flames and replaced the candelabra upon the table; but this had taken him a few seconds to do, and those seconds had been all that Marguerite needed to cast a quick glance at the paper, and to note its contents—a dozen words in the same distorted handwriting she had seen before, and bearing the same device—a star-shaped flower drawn in red ink.

When Sir Andrew once more looked at her, he only saw on her face alarm at the untoward accident and relief at its happy issue; whilst the tiny and momentous note had apparently fluttered to the ground. Eagerly the young man picked it up, and his face looked much relieved, as his fingers closed tightly over it.

"For shame, Sir Andrew," she said, shaking her head with a playful sigh, "making havoc in the heart of some impressionable duchess, whilst conquering the affections of my sweet little Suzanne. Well, well! I do believe it was Cupid himself who stood by you, and threatened the entire Foreign Office with destruction by fire, just on purpose to make me drop love's message, before it had been polluted by my indiscreet eyes. To think that, a moment longer, and I might have known the secrets of an erring duchess."

"You will forgive me, Lady Blakeney," said Sir Andrew, now as calm as she was herself, "if I resume the interesting occupation which you had interrupted?"

"By all means, Sir Andrew! How should I venture to thwart the love-god again? Perhaps he would mete out some terrible chastisement against my presumption. Burn your love-token, by all means!"

Sir Andrew had already twisted the paper into a long spill, and was once again holding it to the flame of the candle which had remained alight. He did not notice the strange smile on the face of his fair *vis-à-vis*, so intent was he on the work of destruction; perhaps, had he done so, the look of relief would have faded from his face. He watched the fateful note, as it curled under the flame. Soon the last fragment fell on the floor, and he placed his heel upon the ashes.

"And now, Sir Andrew," said Marguerite Blakeney, with the pretty nonchalance peculiar to herself, and with the most winning of smiles, "will you venture to excite the jealousy of your fair lady by asking me to dance the minuet?"

13

EITHER—OR?

THE few words which Marguerite Blakeney had managed to read on the half-scorched piece of paper seemed literally to be the words of Fate. "Start myself to-morrow. . . ." This she had read quite distinctly, then came a blur caused by the smoke of the candle, which obliterated the next few words; but, right at the bottom, there was another sentence, which was now standing clearly and distinctly, like letters of fire, before her mental vision. "If you wish to speak to me again, I shall be in the supper-room at one o'clock precisely." The whole was signed with the hastily-scrawled little device—a tiny star-shaped flower, which had become so familiar to her.

One o'clock precisely! It was now close upon eleven, the last minuet was being danced, with Sir Andrew Ffoulkes and beautiful Lady Blakeney leading the couples through its delicate and intricate figures.

Close upon eleven! the hands of the handsome Louis XV clock upon its ormolu bracket seemed to move along with maddening rapidity. Two hours more, and her fate and that of Armand would be sealed. In two hours she must make up her mind whether she will keep the knowledge so cunningly gained to herself, and leave her brother to his fate, or whether she will wilfully betray a brave man, whose life was devoted to his fellow-men, who was noble, generous and above all, unsuspecting. It seemed a horrible thing to do. But then, there was Armand! Armand, too, was noble and brave. Armand, too, was unsuspecting. And Armand loved her, would have willingly trusted his life in her hands, and now, when she could save him from death, she hesitated. Oh! it was monstrous; her brother's kind, gentle face, so full of love for her, seemed to be looking reproachfully at her. "You might have saved me, Margot!" he seemed to say to her, "and you chose the life of a stranger, a man you do not know, whom you have never seen, and preferred that he should be safe, whilst you sent me to the guillotine!"

All these conflicting thoughts raged through Marguerite's brain, while, with a smile upon her lips, she glided through the graceful mazes of the minuet. She noted—with that acute sense of hers—that she had succeeded in completely allaying Sir Andrew's fears. Her self-control had been absolutely perfect—she was a finer actress at this moment, and throughout the whole of this minuet, than she had ever been upon the boards of the Comédie Française; but then a beloved brother's life had not depended upon her histrionic powers.

She was too clever to overdo her part, and made no further allusions to the supposed *billet doux*, which had caused Sir Andrew Ffoulkes such an agonizing five minutes. She watched his anxiety melting away under her sunny smile, and soon perceived that, whatever doubt may have crossed his mind at the moment, she had, by the time the last bars of the minuet had been played, succeeded in completely dispelling it, he never realized in what a fever of excitement she was, what effort it cost her to keep up a constant ripple of *banal* conversation.

When the minuet was over, she asked Sir Andrew to take her into the next room.

"I have promised to go down to supper with His Royal Highness," she said, "but before we part, tell me . . . am I forgiven?"

"Forgiven?"

"Yes! Confess, I gave you a fright just now. . . . But, remember, I am not an Englishwoman, and I do not look upon the exchanging of *billet doux* as a crime, and I vow I'll not tell my little Suzanne. But now, tell me, shall I welcome you at my water-party on Wednesday?"

"I am not sure, Lady Blakeney," he replied evasively. "I may have to leave London to-morrow."

"I would not do that, if I were you," she said earnestly; then seeing the anxious look once more reappearing in his eyes, she added gaily: "No one can throw a ball better than you can, Sir Andrew; we should so miss you on the bowling-green."

He had led her across the room to one beyond, where already His Royal Highness was waiting for the beautiful Lady Blakeney.

"Madame, supper awaits us," said the Prince, offering his arm to Marguerite, "and I am full of hope. The goddess Fortune has frowned so persistently on me at hazard, that I look with confidence for the smiles of the goddess of Beauty."

"Your Highness has been unfortunate at the card-tables?" asked Marguerite, as she took the Prince's arm.

"Aye! most unfortunate. Blakeney, not content with being the richest among my father's subjects, has also the most outrageous luck. By the way, where is that inimitable wit? I vow, Madam, that this life would be but a dreary desert without your smiles and his sallies."

14

ONE O'CLOCK PRECISELY!

Supper had been extremely gay. All those present declared that never had Lady Blakeney been more adorable nor that "demmed idiot," Sir Percy, more amusing.

His Royal Highness had laughed until the tears streamed down his cheeks at Blakeney's foolish yet funny repartees. His doggerel verse, "We seek him here, we seek him there," etc., was sung to the tune of "Ho! Merry Britons!" and to the accompaniment of glasses knocked loudly against the table. Lord Grenville, moreover, had a most perfect cook—some wags asserted that he was scion of the old French *noblesse*, who, having lost his fortune, had come to seek it in the *cuisine* of the Foreign Office.

Marguerite Blakeney was in her most brilliant mood. and surely not a soul in that crowded supper-room had even an inkling of the terrible struggle which was raging within her heart.

The clock was ticking so mercilessly on. It was long past midnight, and even the Prince of Wales was thinking of leaving the supper-table. Within the next half-hour the destinies of two brave men would be pitted against one another—the dearly-beloved brother and he, the unknown hero.

Marguerite had not even tried to see Chauvelin during this last hour; she knew that his keen, fox-like eyes would terrify her at once, and incline the balance of her decision towards Armand. Whilst she did not see him, there still lingered in her heart of hearts a vague, undefined hope that "something" would occur, something big, enormous, epoch-making, which would shift from her young, weak shoulders this terrible burden of responsibility, of having to choose between two such cruel alternatives.

But the minutes ticked on with that dull monotony which they invariably seem to assume when our very nerves ache with their incessant ticking.

After supper, dancing was resumed. His Royal Highness had left, and there was general talk of departing among the older guests; the young ones were indefatigable and had started on a new gavotte, which would fill the next quarter of an hour.

Marguerite did not feel equal to another dance; there is a limit to the most enduring self-control. Escorted by a Cabinet Minister, she had once more found her way to the tiny boudoir, still the most deserted among all the rooms. She knew that Chauvelin must be lying in wait for her somewhere, ready to seize the first possible opportunity for a *tête-à-tête*. His eyes had met hers for a moment after the 'fore-supper minuet, and she knew that the keen diplomatist, with those searching pale eyes of his, had divined that her work was accomplished.

Fate had willed it so. Marguerite, torn by the most terrible conflict heart of woman can ever know, had resigned to its decrees. But Armand must be saved at any cost; he, first of all, for he was her brother, had been mother, father, friend to her ever since she, a tiny babe, had lost both her parents. To think of Armand dying a traitor's death on the guillotine was too horrible even to dwell upon—impossible, in fact. That could never be, never. . . . As for the stranger, the hero . . . well! there, let Fate decide. Marguerite would redeem her brother's life at the hands of the relentless enemy, then let that cunning Scarlet Pimpernel extricate himself after that.

Perhaps—vaguely—Marguerite hoped that the daring plotter, who for so many months had baffled an army of spies, would still manage to evade Chauvelin and remain immune to the end.

She thought of all this, as she sat listening to the witty discourse of the Cabinet Minister, who, no doubt, felt that he had found in Lady Blakeney a most perfect listener. Suddenly she saw the keen, fox-like face of Chauvelin peeping through the curtained doorway.

"Lord Fancourt," she said to the Minister, "will you do me a service?"

"I am entirely at your ladyship's service," he replied gallantly.

"Will you see if my husband is still in the card-room? And if he is, will you tell him that I am very tired, and would be glad to go home soon."

The commands of a beautiful woman are binding on all mankind, even on Cabinet Ministers. Lord Fancourt prepared to obey instantly.

"I do not like to leave your ladyship alone," he said.

"Never fear. I shall be quite safe here—and, I think, undisturbed . . . but I am really tired. You know Sir Percy will drive back to Richmond. It is a long way, and we shall not—and we do not hurry—get home before daybreak."

Lord Fancourt had perforce to go.

The moment he had disappeared, Chauvelin slipped into the room, and the next instant stood calm and impassive by her side.

"You have news for me?" he said.

An icy mantle seemed to have suddenly settled round Marguerite's shoulders; though her cheeks glowed with fire, she felt chilled and numbed. Oh, Armand! will you ever know the terrible sacrifice of pride, of dignity, of womanliness a devoted sister is making for your sake?

"Nothing of importance," she said, staring mechanically before her, "but it might prove a clue. I contrived—no matter how—to detect Sir Andrew Ffoulkes in the very act of burning a paper at one of these candles, in this very room. That paper I succeeded in holding between my fingers for the space of two minutes, and to cast my eyes on it for that of ten seconds."

"Time enough to learn its contents?" asked Chauvelin quietly.

She nodded. Then she continued in the same even, mechanical tone of voice—

"In the corner of the paper there was the usual rough device of a small star-shaped flower. Above it I read two lines, everything else was scorched and blackened by the flame."

"And what were these two lines?"

Her throat seemed suddenly to have contracted. For an instant she felt that she could not speak the words which might send a brave man to his death.

"It is lucky that the whole paper was not burned," added Chauvelin, with dry sarcasm, "for it might have fared ill with Armand St. Just. What were the two lines, citoyenne?"

"One was, 'I start myself to-morrow,'" she said quietly; "the other—'If you wish to speak to me, I shall be in the supper-room at one o'clock precisely.'"

Chauvelin looked up at the clock just above the mantelpiece.

"Then I have plenty of time," he said placidly.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

She was pale as a statue, her hands were icy cold, her head and heart throbbed with the awful strain upon her nerves. Oh, this was cruel! cruel! What had she done to have deserved all this? Her choice was made: had she done a vile action or one that was sublime? The recording angel, who writes in the book of gold, alone could give an answer.

"What are you going to do?" she repeated mechanically.

"Oh, nothing for the present. After that it will depend."

"On what?"

"On whom I shall see in the supper-room at one o'clock precisely."

"You will see the Scarlet Pimpernel, of course. But you do not know him."

"No. But I shall presently."

"Sir Andrew will have warned him."

"I think not. When you parted from him after the minuet he stood and watched you for a moment or two, with a look which gave me to understand that something had happened between you. It was only natural, was it not? that I should make a shrewd guess as to the nature of that 'something.' I thereupon engaged the young gallant in a long and animated conversation—we discussed Herr Glück's singular success in London—until a lady claimed his arm for supper."

"Since then?"

"I did not lose sight of him through supper. When we all came upstairs again, Lady Portarles buttonholed him and started on the subject of pretty Mlle. Suzanne de Tournay. I knew he would not move until Lady Portarles had exhausted the subject, which will not be for another quarter of an hour at least, and it is five minutes to one now."

He was preparing to go, and went up to the doorway, where, drawing aside the curtain, he stood for a moment pointing out to Marguerite the distant figure of Sir Andrew Ffoulkes in close conversation with Lady Portarles.

"I think," he said, with a triumphant smile, "that I may safely expect to find the person I seek in the dining-room, fair lady."

"There may be more than one."

"Whoever is there, as the clock strikes one, will be shadowed by one of my men; of these, one, or perhaps two, or even three, will leave for France to-morrow. *One* of these will be the 'Scarlet Pimpernel.'"

"Yes?—And?"

"I also, fair lady, will leave for France to-morrow. The papers found at Dover upon the person of Sir Andrew Ffoulkes speak of the neighbourhood of Calais, of an inn which I know well, called *Le Chat Gris*, of a lonely place somewhere on the coast—the Père Blanchard's hut—which I must endeavour to find. All these places are given as the point where this meddlesome Englishman has bidden the traitor de Tournay and others to meet his emissaries. But it seems that he has decided not to send his emissaries, that 'he will start himself to-morrow.' Now, one of those persons whom I shall see anon in the supper-room will be journeying to Calais, and I shall follow that person, until I have tracked him to where those fugitive aristocrats await him; for that person, fair lady, will be the man whom I have sought for, for nearly a year, the man whose energy has outdone me, whose ingenuity has baffled me, whose audacity has set me wondering—yes! me!—who have seen a trick or two in my time—the mysterious and elusive Scarlet Pimpernel."

"And Armand?" she pleaded.

"Have I ever broken my word? I promise you that the day the Scarlet Pimpernel and I start for France, I will send you that imprudent letter of his by special courier. More than that, I will pledge you the word of France, that the day I lay hands on that meddlesome Englishman, St. Just will be here in England, safe in the arms of his charming sister."

And with a deep and elaborate bow and another look at the clock, Chauvelin glided out of the room.

It seemed to Marguerite that through all the noise, all the din of music, dancing, and laughter, she could hear his cat-like tread, gliding through the vast reception-rooms; that she could hear him go down the massive staircase, reach the dining-room and open the door. Fate *had* decided, had made her speak, had made her do a vile and abominable thing, for the sake of the brother she loved. She lay back in her chair, passive and still, seeing the figure of her relentless enemy ever present before her aching eyes.

When Chauvelin reached the supper-room it was quite deserted. It had that woebegone, forsaken, tawdry appearance, which reminds one so much of a ball-dress the morning after.

Half-empty glasses littered the table, unfolded napkins lay about, the chairs—turned towards one another in groups of twos and threes—seemed like the seats of ghosts in close conversation with one another. There were sets of two chairs—very close to one another—in the far corners of the room, which spoke of recent whispered flirtations, over cold game-pie and iced champagne; there were sets of three and four chairs, that recalled pleasant animated discussions over the latest scandals; there were chairs straight up in a row that still looked starchy, critical, acid, like antiquated dowagers; there were a few isolated, single chairs, close to the table, that spoke of gourmands intent on the most *recherché* dishes, and others overturned on the floor, that spoke volumes on the subject of my Lord Grenville's cellars.

It was a ghostlike replica, in fact, of that fashionable gathering upstairs; a ghost that haunts every house, where balls and good suppers are given; a picture drawn with white chalk, on grey cardboard, dull and colourless, now that the bright silk dresses and gorgeously embroidered coats were no longer there to fill in the foreground, and now that the candles flickered sleepily in their sockets.

Chauvelin smiled benignly, and rubbing his long, thin hands together, he looked round the deserted supper-room, whence even the last flunkey had retired in order to join his friends in the hall below. All was silence in the dimly-lighted room, whilst the sound of the gavotte, the hum of distant talk and laughter, and the rumble of an occasional coach outside, only seemed to reach this palace of the Sleeping Beauty as the murmur of some flitting spooks far away.

It all looked so peaceful, so luxurious, and so still, that the keenest observer—a veritable prophet—could never have guessed that, at this present moment, that deserted supper-room was nothing but a trap laid for the capture of the most cunning and audacious plotter those stirring times had ever seen.

Chauvelin pondered and tried to peer into the immediate future. What would this man be like, whom he and the leaders of a whole revolution had sworn to bring to his death? Everything about him was weird and mysterious; his personality, which he has so cunningly concealed, the power he wielded over nineteen English gentlemen who seemed to obey his every command blindly and enthusiastically, the passionate love and submission he had roused in his little trained band, and, above all, his marvellous audacity, the boundless impudence which had caused him to beard his most implacable enemies, within the very walls of Paris.

No wonder that in France the *sobriquet* of the mysterious Englishman roused in the people a superstitious shudder. Chauvelin himself, as he gazed round the deserted room, where presently the weird hero would appear, felt a strange feeling of awe creeping all down his spine.

But his plans were well laid. He felt sure that the Scarlet Pimpernel had not been warned, and felt equally sure that Marguerite Blakeney had not played him false. If she had . . . a cruel look, that would have made her shudder, gleamed in Chauvelin's keen, pale eyes. If she had played him a trick, Armand St. Just would suffer the extreme penalty.

But no, no! of course she had not played him false!

Fortunately the supper-room was deserted: this would make Chauvelin's task all the easier, when presently that unsuspecting enigma would enter it alone. No one was here now save Chauvelin himself.

Stay! as he surveyed with a satisfied smile the solitude of the room, the cunning agent of the French Government became aware of the peaceful, monotonous breathing of some one of my Lord Grenville's guests, who, no doubt, had supped both wisely and well, and was enjoying a quiet sleep, away from the din of the dancing above.

Chauvelin looked round once more, and there in the corner of a sofa, in the dark angle of the room, his mouth open, his eyes shut, the sweet sounds of peaceful slumbers proceeding from his nostrils, reclined the gorgeously apparelled, long-limbed husband of the cleverest woman in Europe.

Chauvelin looked at him as he lay there, placid, unconscious, at peace with all the world and himself, after the best of suppers, and a smile, that was almost one of pity, softened for a moment the hard lines of the Frenchman's face and the sarcastic twinkle of his pale eyes.

Evidently the slumberer, deep in dreamless sleep, would not interfere with Chauvelin's trap for catching that cunning Scarlet Pimpernel. Again he rubbed his hands together, and, following the example of Sir Percy Blakeney, he too stretched himself out in the corner of another sofa, shut his eyes, opened his mouth, gave forth sounds of peaceful breathing, and . . . waited!

15

DOUBT

MARGUERITE BLAKENEY had watched the slight sable-clad figure of Chauvelin, as he worked his way through the ball-room. Then perforce she had had to wait, while her nerves tingled with excitement.

Listlessly she sat in the small, still deserted boudoir, looking through the curtained doorway on the dancing couples beyond: looking at them, yet seeing nothing, hearing the music, yet conscious of naught save a feeling of expectancy, of anxious, weary waiting.

Her mind conjured up before her the vision of what was, perhaps at this very moment, passing downstairs. The half-deserted dining-room, the fateful hour—Chauvelin on the watch!—then, precise to the moment, the entrance of a man, he, the Scarlet Pimpernel, the mysterious leader, who to Marguerite had become almost unreal, so strange, so weird was this hidden identity.

She wished she were in the supper-room, too, at this moment, watching him as he entered; she knew that her woman's penetration would at once recognize in the stranger's face—whoever he might be—that strong individuality which belongs to a leader of men—to a hero; to the mighty, high-soaring eagle, whose daring wings were becoming entangled in the ferret's trap.

Woman-like, she thought of him with unmixed sadness; the irony of that fate seemed so cruel which allowed the fearless lion to succumb to the gnawing of a rat! Ah! had Armand's life not been at stake! . . .

"Faith! your ladyship must have thought me very remiss," said a voice suddenly, close to her elbow. "I had a deal of difficulty in delivering your message, for I could not find Blakeney anywhere at first . . ."

Marguerite had forgotten all about her husband and her message to him; his very name, as spoken by Lord Fancourt, sounded strange and unfamiliar to her, so completely had she in the last five minutes lived her old life in the Rue de Richelieu again, with Armand always near her to love and protect her, to guard her from the many subtle intrigues which were for ever raging in Paris in those days.

"I did find him at last," continued Lord Fancourt, "and gave him your message. He said that he would give orders at once for the horses to be put in."

"Ah!" she said, still very absently, "you found my husband, and gave him my message?"

"Yes; he was in the dining-room fast asleep. I could not manage to wake him up at first."

"Thank you very much," she said mechanically, trying to collect her thoughts.

"Will your ladyship honour me with the contre-danse until your coach is ready?" asked Lord Fancourt.

"No, I thank you, my lord, but—and you will forgive me—I really am too tired, and the heat in the ball-room has become oppressive."

"The conservatory is deliciously cool; let me take you there, and then get you something. You seem ailing, Lady Blakeney."

"I am only very tired," she repeated wearily, as she allowed Lord Fancourt to lead her, where subdued lights and green plants lent coolness to the air. He got her a chair, into which she sank. This long interval of waiting was intolerable. Why did not Chauvelin come and tell her the result of his watch?

Lord Fancourt was very attentive. She scarcely heard what he said, and suddenly startled him by asking abruptly—

"Lord Fancourt, did you perceive who was in the dining-room just now beside Sir Percy Blakeney?"

"Only the agent of the French Government, M. Chauvelin, equally fast asleep in another corner," he said. "Why does your ladyship ask?"

"I know not . . . I . . . Did you notice the time when you were there?"

"It must have been about five or ten minutes past one. . . . I wonder what your ladyship is thinking about," he added, for evidently the fair lady's thoughts were very far away, and she had not been listening to his intellectual conversation.

But indeed her thoughts were not very far away: only one storey below, in this same house, in the dining-room where sat Chauvelin still on the watch. Had he failed? For one instant that possibility rose before her as a hope—the hope that the Scarlet Pimpernel had been warned by Sir Andrew, and that Chauvelin's trap had failed to catch his bird; but that hope soon gave way to fear. Had he failed? But then—Armand!

Lord Fancourt had given up talking since he found that he had no listener. He wanted an opportunity for slipping away: for sitting opposite to a lady, however fair, who is evidently not heeding the most vigorous efforts made for her entertainment, is not exhilarating, even to a Cabinet Minister.

"Shall I find out if your ladyship's coach is ready?" he said at last, tentatively.

"Oh, thank you . . . thank you . . . if you would be so kind . . . I fear I am but sorry company . . . but I am really tired . . . and, perhaps, would be best alone."

She had been longing to be rid of him, for she hoped that, like the fox he so resembled, Chauvelin would be prowling round, thinking to find her alone.

But Lord Fancourt went, and still Chauvelin did not come. Oh! what had happened? She felt Armand's fate trembling in the balance . . . she feared—now with a deadly fear—that Chauvelin *had* failed, and that the mysterious Scarlet Pimpernel had proved elusive once more; then she knew that she need hope for no pity, no mercy, from him.

He had pronounced his "Either—or——" and nothing less would content him: he was very spiteful, and would affect the belief that she had wilfully misled him, and having failed to trap the eagle once again, his revengeful mind would be content with the humble prey—Armand!

Yet she had done her best; had strained every nerve for Armand's sake. She could not bear to think that all had failed. She could not sit still; she wanted to go and hear the worst at once; she wondered even that Chauvelin had not come yet, to vent his wrath and satire upon her.

Lord Grenville himself came presently to tell her that her coach was ready, and that Sir Percy was already waiting for her—ribbons in hand. Marguerite said "Farewell" to her distinguished host; many of her friends stopped her, as she crossed the rooms, to talk to her, and exchange pleasant *au revoirs*.

The Minister only took final leave of beautiful Lady Blakeney on the top of the stairs; below, on the landing, a veritable army of gallant gentlemen were waiting to bid "Good-bye" to the queen of beauty and fashion, whilst outside, under the massive portico, Sir Percy's magnificent bays were impatiently pawing the ground.

At the top of the stairs, just after she had taken final leave of her host, she suddenly saw Chauvelin; he was coming up the stairs slowly, and rubbing his thin hands very softly together.

There was a curious look on his mobile face, partly amused and wholly puzzled, and as his keen eyes met Marguerite's they became strangely sarcastic.

"M. Chauvelin," she said, as he stopped on the top of the stairs, bowing elaborately before her, "my coach is outside; may I claim your arm?"

As gallant as ever, he offered her his arm and led her downstairs. The crowd was very great, some of the Minister's guests were departing, others were leaning against the banisters watching the throng as it filed up and down the wide staircase.

"Chauvelin," she said at last desperately, "I must know what has happened."

"What has happened, dear lady?" he said, with affected surprise. "Where? When?"

"You are torturing me, Chauvelin. I have helped you to-night . . . surely I have the right to know. What happened in the dining-room at one o'clock just now?"

She spoke in a whisper, trusting that in the general hubbub of the crowd her words would remain unheeded by all save the man at her side.

"Quiet and peace reigned supreme, fair lady; at that hour I was asleep in the corner of one sofa and Sir Percy Blakeney in another."

"Nobody came into the room at all?"

"Nobody."

"Then we have failed, you and I? . . ."

"Yes! we have failed—perhaps."

"But, Armand?" she pleaded.

"Ah! Armand St. Just's chances hang on a thread . . . pray heaven, dear lady, that that thread may not snap."

"Chauvelin, I worked for you, sincerely, earnestly . . . remember. . . ."

"I remember my promise," he said quietly; "the day that the Scarlet Pimpernel and I meet on French soil, St. Just will be in the arms of his charming sister."

"Which means that a brave man's blood will be on my hands," she said, with a shudder.

"His blood, or that of your brother. Surely at the present moment you must hope, as I do, that the enigmatical Scarlet Pimpernel will start for Calais to-day——"

"I am only conscious of one hope, citoyen."

"And that is?"

"That Satan, your master, will have need of you, elsewhere, before the sun rises to-day."

"You flatter me, citoyenne."

She had detained him for a while, midway down the stairs, trying to get at the thoughts which lay beyond that thin, fox-like mask. But Chauvelin remained urbane, sarcastic, mysterious; not a line betrayed to the poor, anxious woman whether she need fear or whether she dared to hope.

Downstairs on the landing she was soon surrounded. Lady Blakeney never stepped from any house into her coach, without an escort of fluttering human moths around the dazzling light of her beauty. But before she finally turned away from Chauvelin, she held out a tiny hand to him, with that pretty gesture of childish appeal which was so essentially her own.

"Give me some hope, my little Chauvelin," she pleaded.

With perfect gallantry he bowed over that tiny hand, which looked so dainty and white through the delicately transparent black lace mitten, and kissing the tips of the rosy fingers—

"Pray heaven that the thread may not snap," he repeated, with his enigmatic smile.

And stepping aside, he allowed the moths to flutter more closely round the candle, and the brilliant throng of the *jeunesse dorée*, eagerly attentive to Lady Blakeney's every movement, hid the keen, fox-like face from her view.

16

RICHMOND

A FEW minutes later she was sitting, wrapped in cosy furs near Sir Percy Blakeney on the box-seat of his magnificent coach, and the four splendid bays had thundered down the quiet street.

The night was warm in spite of the gentle breeze which fanned Marguerite's burning cheeks. Soon London houses were left behind, and rattling over old Hammersmith Bridge, Sir Percy was driving his bays rapidly towards Richmond.

The river wound in and out in its pretty delicate curves, looking like a silver serpent beneath the glittering rays of the moon. Long shadows from overhanging trees spread occasional deep palls right across the road. The bays were rushing along at breakneck speed, held but slightly back by Sir Percy's strong, unerring hands.

These nightly drives after balls and suppers in London were a source of perpetual delight to Marguerite, and she appreciated her husband's eccentricity keenly, which caused him to adopt this mode of taking her home every night, to their beautiful home by the river, instead of living in a stuffy London house. He loved driving his spirited horses along the lonely, moonlit roads, and she loved to sit on the box-seat, with the soft air of an English late summer's night fanning her face, after the hot atmosphere of a ball- or supper-party. The drive was not a long one—less than an hour, sometimes, when the bays were very fresh, and Sir Percy gave them full rein.

To-night he seemed to have a very devil in his fingers, and the coach seemed to fly along the road, beside the river. As usual, he did not speak to her, but stared straight in front of him, the ribbons seeming to lie quite loosely in his slender, white hands. Marguerite looked at him tentatively once or twice; she could see his handsome profile, and one lazy eye, with its straight fine brow and drooping heavy lid.

The face in the moonlight looked singularly earnest, and recalled to Marguerite's aching heart those happy days of courtship, before he had become the lazy nincompoop, the effete fop, whose life seemed spent in card- and supper-rooms.

But now, in the moonlight, she could not catch the expression of the lazy blue eyes; she could only see the outline of the firm chin, the corner of the strong mouth, the well-cut massive shape of the forehead; truly, nature had meant well by Sir Percy; his faults must all be laid at the door of that poor, half-crazy mother, and of the distracted heart-broken father, neither of whom had cared for the young life which was sprouting up between them, and which, perhaps, their very carelessness was already beginning to wreck.

Marguerite suddenly felt intense sympathy for her husband. The moral crisis she had just gone through made her feel indulgent towards the faults, the delinquencies, of others.

How thoroughly a human being can be buffeted and overmastered by Fate, had been borne in upon her with appalling force. Had anyone told her a week ago that she would stoop to spy upon her friends, that she would betray a brave and unsuspecting man into the hands of a relentless enemy, she would have laughed the idea to scorn.

Yet she had done these things: anon, perhaps the death of that brave man would be at her door, just as two years ago the Marquis de St. Cyr had perished through a thoughtless word of hers; but in that case she was morally innocent—she had meant no serious harm—fate merely had stepped in. But this time she had done a thing that obviously was base, had done it deliberately, for a motive which, perhaps, high moralists would not even appreciate.

And as she felt her husband's strong arm beside her, she also felt how much more he would dislike and despise her, if he knew of this night's work. Thus human beings judge of one another, superficially, casually, throwing contempt on one another, with but little reason, and no charity. She despised her husband for his inanities and vulgar, unintellectual occupations; and he, she felt, would despise her still worse, because she had not been strong enough to do right for right's sake, and to sacrifice her brother to the dictates of her conscience.

Buried in her thoughts, Marguerite had found this hour in the breezy summer night all too brief; and it was with a feeling of keen disappointment that she suddenly realized that the bays had turned into the massive gates of her beautiful English home.

Sir Percy Blakeney's house on the river has become an historic one: palatial in its dimensions, it stands in the midst of exquisitely laid-out gardens, with a picturesque terrace and frontage to the river. Built in Tudor days, the old red bricks of the walls look eminently picturesque in the midst of a bower of green, the beautiful lawn, with its old sundial, adding the true note of harmony to its foreground. Great secular trees lent cool shadows to the grounds, and now, on this warm early autumn night, the leaves slightly turned to russets and gold, the old garden looked singularly poetic and peaceful in the moonlight.

With unerring precision, Sir Percy had brought the four bays to a standstill immediately in front of the fine Elizabethan entrance hall; in spite of the lateness of the hour, an army of grooms seemed to have emerged from the very ground, as the coach had thundered up, and were standing respectfully round.

Sir Percy jumped down quickly, then helped Marguerite to alight. She lingered outside for a moment, whilst he gave a few orders to one of his men. She skirted the house, and stepped on to the lawn, looking out dreamily into the silvery landscape. Nature seemed exquisitely at peace in comparison with the tumultuous emotions she had gone through: she could faintly hear the ripple of the river and the occasional soft and ghost-like fall of a dead leaf from a tree.

All else was quiet round her. She had heard the horses prancing as they were being led away to their distant stables, the hurrying of servants' feet as they had all gone within to rest: the house also was quite still. In two separate suites of apartments, just above the magnificent reception-rooms, lights were still burning; they were her rooms, and his, well divided from each other by the whole width of the house, as far apart as their own lives had become. Involuntarily she sighed—at that moment she could really not have told why.

She was suffering from unconquerable heartache. Deeply and achingly she was sorry for herself. Never had she felt so pitiably lonely, so bitterly in want of comfort and of sympathy. With another sigh she turned away from the river towards the house, vaguely wondering if, after such a night, she could ever find rest and sleep.

Suddenly, before she reached the terrace, she heard a firm step upon the crisp gravel, and the next moment her husband's figure emerged out of the shadow. He, too, had skirted the house, and was wandering along the lawn, towards the river. He still wore his heavy driving-coat with the numerous lapels and collars he himself had set in fashion, but he had thrown it well back, burying his hands, as was his wont, in the deep pockets of his satin breeches; the gorgeous white costume he had worn at Lord Grenville's ball, with its jabot of priceless lace, looked strangely ghostly against the dark background of the house.

He apparently did not notice her, for after a moment's pause, he presently turned back towards the house, and walked straight up to the terrace.

"Sir Percy!"

He already had one foot on the lowest of the terrace steps, but at her voice he started, and paused, then looked searchingly into the shadows whence she had called to him.

She came forward quickly into the moonlight, and, as soon as he saw her he said, with that air of consummate gallantry he always wore when speaking to her—

"At your service, Madame!"

But his foot was still on the step, and in his whole attitude there was a remote suggestion distinctly visible to her, that he wished to go, and had no desire for a midnight interview.

"The air is deliciously cool," she said, "the moonlight peaceful and poetic, and the garden inviting. Will you not stay in it awhile? the hour is not yet late, or is my company so distasteful to you that you are in a hurry to rid yourself of it?"

"Nay, Madame," he rejoined placidly, "but 'tis on the other foot the shoe happens to be, and I'll warrant you'll find the midnight air more pathetic without my company: no doubt the sooner I remove the obstruction the better your ladyship will like it."

He turned once more to go.

"I protest you mistake me, Sir Percy," she said hurriedly, and drawing a little closer to him; "the estrangement, which alas! has arisen between us, was none of my making, remember."

"Begad! you must pardon me there, Madame!" he protested coldly, "my memory was always of the shortest."

He looked her straight in the eyes, with that lazy nonchalance which had become second nature to him. She returned his gaze for a moment, then her eyes softened as she came up quite close to him, to the foot of the terrace steps.

"Of the shortest, Sir Percy? Faith! how it must have altered! Was it three years ago or four that you saw me for one hour in Paris, on your way to the East? When you came back two years later you had not forgotten me."

She looked divinely pretty as she stood there in the moonlight, with the fur-cloak sliding off her beautiful shoulders, the gold embroidery on her dress shimmering around her, her childlike blue eyes turned up fully at him.

He stood for a moment, rigid and still, but for the clenching of his hand against the stone balustrade of the terrace.

"You desired my presence, Madame," he said frigidly. "I take it that it was not with a view to indulging in tender reminiscences."

His voice certainly was cold and uncompromising: his attitude before her, stiff and unbending. Womanly decorum would have suggested that Marguerite should return coldness for coldness, and should sweep past him without another word, only with a curt nod of the head: but womanly instinct suggested that she should remain—that keen instinct, which makes a beautiful woman, conscious of her powers, long to bring to her knees the one man who pays her no homage. She stretched out her hand to him.

"Nay, Sir Percy, why not? the present is not so glorious but that I should not wish to dwell a little in the past."

He bent his tall figure, and taking hold of the extreme tip of the fingers which she still held out to him, he kissed them ceremoniously.

"I'faith, Madame," he said, "then you will pardon me, if my dull wits cannot accompany you there."

Once again he attempted to go, once more her voice, sweet, childlike, almost tender, called him back.

"Sir Percy."

"Your servant, Madame."

"Is it possible that love can die?" she said with sudden, unreasoning vehemence. "Methought that the passion which you once felt for me would outlast the span of human life. Is there nothing left of that love, Percy . . . which might help you . . . to bridge over that sad estrangement?"

His massive figure seemed, while she spoke thus to him, to stiffen still more, the strong mouth hardened, a look of relentless obstinacy crept into the habitually lazy blue eyes.

"With what object, I pray you, Madame?" he asked coldly.

"I do not understand you."

"Yet, 'tis simple enough," he said with sudden bitterness, which seemed literally to surge through his words, though he was making visible efforts to suppress it. "I humbly put the question to you, for my slow wits are unable to grasp the cause of this, your ladyship's sudden new mood. Is it that you have the taste to renew the devilish sport which you played so successfully last year? Do you wish to see me once more a love-sick suppliant at your feet, so that you might again have the pleasure of kicking me aside like a troublesome lap-dog?"

She had succeeded in rousing him for the moment: and again she looked straight at him, for it was thus she remembered him a year ago.

"Percy! I entreat you!" she whispered, "can we not bury the past?"

"Pardon me, Madame, but I understood you to say that your desire was to dwell in it."

"Nay! I spoke not of *that* past, Percy!" she said, while a tone of tenderness crept into her voice. "Rather did I speak of the time when you loved me still! and I . . . oh! I was vain and frivolous; your wealth and position allured me: I married you hoping in my heart that your great love for me would beget in me a love for you . . . but, alas! . . ."

The moon had sunk low down behind a bank of clouds. In the east a soft grey light was beginning to chase away the heavy mantle of the night. He could only see her graceful outline now, the small queenly head, with its wealth of reddish-golden curls, and the glittering gems forming the small, star-shaped, red flower which she wore as a diadem in her hair.

"Twenty-four hours after our marriage, Madame, the Marquis de St. Cyr and all his family perished on the guillotine, and the popular rumour reached me that it was the wife of Sir Percy Blakeney who helped to send them there."

"Nay! I myself told you the truth of that odious tale."

"Not till after it had been recounted to me by strangers, with all its horrible details."

"And you believed them then and there," she said with great vehemence, "without a proof or question—you believed that I, whom you vowed you loved more than life, whom you professed you worshipped, that *I* could do a thing so base as these *strangers* chose to recount. You thought I meant to deceive you about it all—that I ought to have spoken before I married you: yet, had you listened, I would have told you that up to the very morning on which St. Cyr went to the guillotine, I was straining every nerve, using every influence I possessed, to save him and his family. But my pride sealed my lips, when your love seemed to perish, as if under the knife of that same guillotine. Yet I would have told you how I was duped! Aye! I, whom that same popular rumour had endowed with the sharpest wits in France! I was tricked into doing this thing, by men who knew how to play upon my love for an only brother, and my desire for revenge. Was it unnatural?"

Her voice became choked with tears. She paused for a moment or two, trying to regain some sort of composure. She looked appealingly at him, almost as if he were her judge. He had allowed her to speak on in her own vehement, impassioned way, offering no comment, no word of sympathy: and now, while she paused, trying to swallow down the hot tears that gushed to her eyes, he waited, impassive and still. The dim grey light of early dawn seemed to make his tall form look taller and more rigid. The lazy, good-natured face looked strangely altered. Marguerite, excited as she was, could see that the eyes were no longer languid, the mouth no longer good-humoured and inane. A curious look of intense passion seemed to glow from beneath his drooping lids, the mouth was tightly closed, the lips compressed, as if the will alone held that surging passion in check.

Marguerite Blakeney was, above all, a woman with all a woman's fascinating foibles, all a woman's most lovable sins. She knew in a moment that for the past few months she had been mistaken: that this man who stood here before her, cold as a statue when her musical voice struck upon his ear, loved her, as he had loved her a year ago: that his passion might have been dormant, but that it was there, as strong, as intense, as overwhelming, as when first her lips met his in one long, maddening kiss.

Pride had kept him from her, and, woman-like, she meant to win back that conquest which had been hers before. Suddenly it seemed to her, that the only happiness life could ever hold for her again would be in feeling that man's kiss once more upon her lips.

"Listen to the tale, Sir Percy," she said, and her voice now was low, sweet, infinitely tender. "Armand was all in all to me! We had no parents, and brought one another up. He was my little father, and I, his tiny mother; we loved one another so. Then one day—do you mind me, Sir Percy? The Marquis de St. Cyr had my brother Armand thrashed—thrashed by his lacqueys—that brother whom I loved better than all the world! And his offence? That he, a plebeian, had dared to love the daughter of the aristocrat; for that he was waylaid and thrashed . . . thrashed like a dog within an inch of his life! Oh, how I suffered! his humiliation had eaten into my very soul! When the opportunity occurred, and I was able to take my revenge, I took it. But I only thought to bring that proud marquis to trouble and humiliation. He plotted with Austria against his own country. Chance gave me knowledge of this; I spoke of it, but I did not know—how could I guess? —they trapped and duped me. When I realized what I had done, it was too late."

"It is perhaps a little difficult, Madame," said Sir Percy, after a moment of silence between them, "to go back over the past. I have confessed to you that my memory is short, but the thought certainly lingered in my mind that, at the time of the Marquis' death, I entreated you for an explanation of those same noisome popular rumours. If that same memory does not, even now, play me a trick, I fancy that you refused me *all* explanation then, and demanded of my love a humiliating allegiance it was not prepared to give."

"I wished to test your love for me, and it did not bear the test. You used to tell me that you drew the very breath of life but for me, and for love of me."

"And to probe that love, you demanded that I should forfeit mine honour," he said, whilst gradually his impassiveness seemed to leave him, his rigidity to relax; "that I should accept without murmur or question, as a dumb and submissive slave, every action of my mistress. My heart overflowing with love and passion I *asked* for no explanation—I *waited* for one, not doubting—only hoping. Had you spoken but one word, from you I would have accepted any explanation, and believed it. But you left me without a word, beyond a bald confession of the actual horrible facts; proudly you returned to your brother's house, and left me alone . . . for weeks . . . not knowing, now, in whom to believe, since the shrine which contained my one illusion lay shattered to earth at my feet."

She need not complain now that he was cold and impassive; his very voice shook with an intensity of passion which he was making superhuman efforts to keep in check.

"Aye! the madness of my pride!" she said sadly. "Hardly had I gone, already I had repented. But when I returned, I found you, oh, so altered! wearing already that mask of somnolent indifference which you have never laid aside until . . . until now."

She was so close to him that her soft, loose hair was wafted against his cheek; her eyes, glowing with tears, maddened him, the music in her voice sent fire through his veins. But he would not yield to the magic charm of this woman he had so deeply loved, and at whose hands his pride had suffered so bitterly. He closed his eyes to shut out the dainty vision of that sweet face, of that snow-white neck and graceful figure, round which the faint rosy light of dawn was just beginning to hover playfully.

"Nay, Madame, it is no mask," he said icily; "I swore to you . . . once, that my life was yours. For months now it has been your plaything . . . it has served its purpose."

But now she knew that that very coldness was a mask. The trouble, the sorrow she had gone through last night, suddenly came back to her mind, but no longer with bitterness, rather with a feeling that this man, who loved her, would help her to bear the burden.

"Sir Percy," she said impulsively, "Heaven knows you have been at pains to make the task, which I had set to myself, terribly difficult to accomplish. You spoke of my mood just now; well! we will call it that, if you will. I wished to speak to you . . . because . . . because I was in trouble . . . and had need . . . of your sympathy."

"It is yours to command, Madame."

"How cold you are!" she sighed. "Faith! I can scarce believe that but a few months ago one tear in my eye had set you wellnigh crazy. Now I come to you . . . with a half-broken heart . . . and . . . and . . ."

"I pray you, Madame," he said, whilst his voice shook almost as much as hers, "in what way can I serve you?"

"Percy!—Armand is in deadly danger. A letter of his . . . rash, impetuous, as were all his actions, and written to Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, has fallen into the hands of a fanatic. Armand is hopelessly compromised . . . to-morrow, perhaps he will be arrested . . . after that the guillotine . . . unless . . . unless . . . oh! it is horrible!" . . . she said, with a sudden wail of anguish, as all the events of the past night came rushing back to her mind, "horrible! . . . and you do not understand . . . you cannot . . . and I have no one to whom I can turn . . . for help . . . or even for sympathy. . . ."

Tears now refused to be held back. All her trouble, her struggles, the awful uncertainty of Armand's fate, overwhelmed her. She tottered, ready to fall, and leaning against the stone balustrade, she buried her face in her hands and sobbed bitterly.

At first mention of Armand St. Just's name and of the peril in which he stood, Sir Percy's face had become a shade more pale, and the look of determination and obstinacy appeared more marked than ever between his eyes. However, he said nothing for the moment, but watched her, as her delicate frame was shaken with sobs, watched her until unconsciously his face softened, and what looked almost like tears, seemed to glisten in his eyes.

"And so," he said with bitter sarcasm, "the murderous dog of the revolution is turning upon the very hands that fed it? . . . Begad, Madame," he added very gently, as Marguerite continued to sob hysterically, "will you dry your tears? . . . I never could bear to see a pretty woman cry, and I . . ."

Instinctively, with sudden, overmastering passion, at sight of her helplessness and of her grief, he stretched out his arms, and the next would have seized her and held her to him, protected from every evil with his very life, his very heart's blood. . . . But pride had the better of it in this struggle once again; he restrained himself with a tremendous effort of will, and said coldly, though still very gently—

"Will you not turn to me, Madame? and tell me in what way I may have the honour to serve you?"

She made a violent effort to control herself, and turning her tear-stained face to him, she once more held out her hand, which he kissed with the same punctilious gallantry; but Marguerite's fingers, this time, lingered in his hand for a second or two longer than was absolutely necessary, and this was because she had felt that his hand trembled perceptibly and was burning hot, whilst his lips felt as cold as marble.

"Can you do ought for Armand?" she said sweetly and simply. "You have so much influence at court . . . so many friends . . ."

"Nay, Madame, should you not rather seek the influence of your French friend, M. Chauvelin? His extends, if I mistake not, even as far as the Republican Government of France."

"I cannot ask him, Percy. . . . Oh! I wish I dared to tell you . . . but . . . but . . . he has put a price on my brother's head, which . . ."

She would have given worlds if she had felt the courage then to tell him everything . . . all she had done that night—how she had suffered and how her hand had been forced. But she dared not give way to that impulse . . . not now, when she was just beginning to feel that he still loved her, when she hoped that she could win him back. She dared not make another confession to him. After all, he might not understand; he might not sympathize with her struggles and temptation. His love, still dormant, might sleep the sleep of death.

Perhaps he divined what was passing in her mind. His whole attitude was one of intense longing—a veritable prayer for that confidence which her foolish pride withheld from him. When she remained silent he sighed, and said with marked coldness—

"Faith, Madame, since it distresses you, we will not speak of it. . . . As for Armand, I pray you have no fear. I pledge you my word that he shall be safe. Now, have I your permission to go? The hour is getting late, and . . ."

"You will at least accept my gratitude?" she said, as she drew quite close to him, and speaking with real tenderness.

With a quick, almost involuntary effort he would have taken her then in his arms, for her eyes were swimming in tears, which he longed to kiss away; but she had lured him once, just like this, then cast him aside like an ill-fitting glove. He thought this was but a mood, a caprice, and he was too proud to lend himself to it once again.

"It is too soon, Madame!" he said quietly; "I have done nothing as yet. The hour is late, and you must be fatigued. Your women will be waiting for you upstairs."

He stood aside to allow her to pass. She sighed, a quick sigh of disappointment. His pride and her beauty had been in direct conflict, and his pride had remained the conqueror. Perhaps, after all, she had been deceived just now; what she took to be the light of love in his eyes might only have been the passion of pride or, who knows, of hatred instead of love. She stood looking at him for a moment or two longer. He was again as rigid, as impassive, as before. Pride had conquered, and he cared naught for her. The grey of dawn was gradually yielding to the rosy light of the rising sun. Birds began to twitter. Nature awakened, smiling in happy response to the warmth of this glorious October morning. Only between these two hearts there lay a strong, impassable barrier, built up of pride on both sides, which neither of them cared to be the first to demolish.

He had bent his tall figure in a low ceremonious bow, as she finally, with another bitter little sigh, began to mount the terrace steps.

The long train of her gold-embroidered gown swept the dead leaves off the steps, making a faint harmonious sh—sh—sh as she glided up, with one hand resting on the balustrade, the rosy light of dawn making an aureole of gold round her hair and causing the rubies on her head and arms to sparkle. She reached the tall glass doors which led into the house. Before entering, she paused once again to look at him, hoping against hope to see his arms stretched out to her, and to hear his voice calling her back. But he had not moved; his massive figure looked the very personification of unbending pride, of fierce obstinacy.

Hot tears again surged to her eyes, and as she would not let him see them, she turned quickly within, and ran as fast as she could up to her own rooms.

Had she but turned back then, and looked out once more on the rose-lit garden, she would have seen that which would have made her own sufferings seem but light and easy to bear—a strong man, overwhelmed with his own passion and his own despair. Pride had given way at last, obstinacy was gone: the will was powerless. He was but a man madly, blindly, passionately in love, and as soon as her light footstep had died away within the house, he knelt down upon the terrace steps, and in the very madness of his love he kissed one by one the places where her small foot had trodden, and the stone balustrade there, where her tiny hand had rested last.

17

FAREWELL

When Marguerite reached her room, she found her maid terribly anxious about her.

"Your ladyship will be so tired," said the poor woman, whose own eyes were half closed with sleep. "It is past five o'clock."

"Ah, yes, Louise, I dare say I shall be tired presently," said Marguerite, kindly; "but you are very tired now, so go to bed at once. I'll get into bed alone."

"But, my lady . . ."

"Now, don't argue, Louise, but go to bed. Give me a wrap, and leave me alone."

Louise was only too glad to obey. She took off her mistress's gorgeous ball-dress, and wrapped her up in a soft billowy gown.

"Does your ladyship wish for anything else?" she asked, when that was done.

"No, nothing more. Put out the lights as you go out."

"Yes, my lady. Good night, my lady."

"Good night, Louise."

When the maid was gone, Marguerite drew aside the curtains and threw open the windows. The garden and the river beyond were flooded with rosy light. Far away to the east, the rays of the rising sun had changed the rose into vivid gold. The lawn was deserted now, and Marguerite looked down upon the terrace where she had stood a few moments ago trying vainly to win back a man's love, which once had been so wholly hers.

It was strange that through all her troubles, all her anxiety for Armand, she was mostly conscious at the present moment of a keen and bitter heartache.

Her very limbs seemed to ache with longing for the love of a man who had spurned her, who had resisted her tenderness, remained cold to her appeals, and had not responded to the glow of passion which had caused her to feel and hope that those happy olden days in Paris were not all dead and forgotten.

How strange it all was! She loved him still. And now that she looked back upon the last few months of misunderstandings and of loneliness, she realized that she had never ceased to love him; that deep down in her heart she had always vaguely felt that his foolish inanities, his empty laugh, his lazy nonchalance were nothing but a mask; that the real man, strong, passionate, wilful, was there still—the man she had loved, whose intensity had fascinated her, whose personality attracted her, since she always felt that behind his apparently slow wits there was a certain something, which he kept hidden from all the world, and most especially from her.

A woman's heart is such a complex problem—the owner thereof is often most incompetent to find the solution of this puzzle.

Did Marguerite Blakeney, "the cleverest woman in Europe," really love a fool? Was it love that she had felt for him a year ago when she married him? Was it love she felt for him now that she realized that he still loved her, but that he would not become her slave, her passionate, ardent lover once again? Nay! Marguerite herself could not have told that. Not at this moment at any rate; perhaps her pride had sealed her mind against a better understanding of her own heart. But this she did know—that she meant to capture that obstinate heart back again. That she would conquer once more . . . and then, that she would never lose him. . . . She would keep him, keep his love, deserve it, and cherish it; for this much was certain, that there was no longer any happiness possible for her without that one man's love.

Thus the most contradictory thoughts and emotions rushed madly through her mind. Absorbed in them, she had allowed time to slip by; perhaps, tired out with long excitement, she had actually closed her eyes and sank into a troubled sleep, wherein quickly fleeting dreams seemed but the continuation of her anxious thoughts—when suddenly she was roused, from dream or meditation, by the noise of footsteps outside her door.

Nervously she jumped up and listened: the house itself was as still as ever; the footsteps had retreated. Through her wide-open windows the brilliant rays of the morning sun were flooding her room with light.

She looked up at the clock; it was half-past six—too early for any of the household to be already astir.

She certainly must have dropped asleep, quite unconsciously. The noise of the footsteps, also of hushed, subdued voices had awakened her—what could they be?

Gently, on tip-toe, she crossed the room and opened the door to listen; not a sound—that peculiar stillness of the early morning, when sleep with all mankind is at its heaviest. But the noise had made her nervous, and when, suddenly at her feet, on the very doorstep, she saw something white lying there—a letter evidently—she hardly dared touch it. It seemed so ghostlike. It certainly was not there when she came upstairs; had Louise dropped it? or was some tantalizing spook at play, showing her fairy letters where none existed?

At last she stooped to pick it up, and amazed, puzzled beyond measure, she saw that the letter was addressed to herself in her husband's large, business-like-looking hand. What could he have to say to her, in the middle of the night, which could not be put off until the morning.

She tore open the envelope and read—

"A most unforeseen circumstance forces me to leave for the North immediately, so I beg your ladyship's pardon if I do not avail myself of the honour of bidding you good-bye. My business may keep me employed for about a week, so I shall not have the privilege of being present at your ladyship's water-party on Wednesday. I remain, your ladyship's most humble and most obedient servant,

"PERCY BLAKENEY."

Marguerite must suddenly have been imbued with her husband's slowness of intellect, for she had perforce to read the few simple lines over and over again, before she could fully grasp their meaning.

She stood on the landing, turning over and over in her hand this curt and mysterious epistle, her mind a blank, her nerves strained with agitation and a presentiment she could not very well have explained.

Sir Percy owned considerable property in the North, certainly, and he had often before gone there alone and stayed away a week at a time; but it seemed so very strange that circumstances should have arisen between five and six o'clock in the morning that compelled him to start in this extreme hurry.

Vainly she tried to shake off an unaccustomed feeling of nervousness: she was trembling from head to foot. A wild, unconquerable desire seized her to see her husband again, at once, if only he had not already started.

Forgetting the fact that she was only very lightly clad in a morning wrap, and that her hair lay loosely about her shoulders, she flew down the stairs, right through the hall towards the front door.

It was as usual barred and bolted, for the indoor servants were not yet up; but her keen ears had detected the sound of voices and the pawing of a horse's hoof against the flagstones.

With nervous, trembling fingers, Marguerite undid the bolts one by one, bruising her hands, hurting her nails, for the locks were heavy and stiff. But she did not care; her whole frame shook with anxiety at the very thought that she might be too late; that he might have gone without her seeing him and bidding him "God-speed!"

At last, she had turned the key and thrown open the door. Her ears had not deceived her. A groom was standing close by holding a couple of horses; one of these was Sultan, Sir Percy's favourite and swiftest horse, saddled ready for a journey.

The next moment Sir Percy himself appeared round the further corner of the house and came quickly towards the horses. He had changed his gorgeous ball costume, but was as usual irreproachably and richly apparelled in a suit of fine cloth, with lace jabot and ruffles, high top-boots and riding-breeches.

Marguerite went forward a few steps. He looked up and saw her. A slight frown appeared between his eyes.

"You are going?" she said quickly and feverishly. "Whither?"

"As I have had the honour of informing your ladyship, urgent, most unexpected business calls me to the North this morning," he said, in his usual cold, drawly manner.

"But . . . your guests to-morrow . . ."

"I have prayed your ladyship to offer my humble excuses to His Royal Highness. You are such a perfect hostess, I do not think that I shall be missed."

"But surely you might have waited for your journey . . . until after our water-party . . ." she said, still speaking quickly and nervously. "Surely the business is not so urgent . . . and you said nothing about it—just now."

"My business, as I had the honour to tell you, Madame, is as unexpected as it is urgent. . . . May I therefore crave your permission to go. . . . Can I do aught for you in town? . . . on my way back?"

"No . . . no . . . thanks . . . nothing. . . . But you will be back soon?"

"Very soon."

"Before the end of the week?"

"I cannot say."

He was evidently trying to get away, whilst she was straining every nerve to keep him back for a moment or two.

"Percy," she said, "will you not tell me why you go to-day? Surely I, as your wife, have the right to know. You have *not* been called away to the North. I know it. There were no letters, no couriers from there before we left for the opera last night, and nothing was waiting for you when we returned from the ball. . . . You are *not* going to the North, I feel convinced. . . . There is some mystery . . . and . . ."

"Nay, there is no mystery, Madame," he replied, with a slight tone of impatience. "My business has to do with Armand . . . there! Now, have I your leave to depart?"

"With Armand . . . But you will run no danger?"

"Danger? I? . . . Nay, Madame, your solicitude does me honour. As you say, I have some influence; my intention is to exert it, before it be too late."

"Will you allow me to thank you at least?"

"Nay, Madame," he said coldly, "there is no need for that. My life is at your service, and I am already more than repaid."

"And mine will be at yours, Sir Percy, if you will but accept it, in exchange for what you do for Armand," she said, as, impulsively, she stretched out both her hands to him. "There! I will not detain you . . . my thoughts go with you. . . . Farewell! . . ."

How lovely she looked in this morning sunlight, with her ardent hair streaming around her shoulders. He bowed very low and kissed her hand; she felt the burning kiss and her heart thrilled with joy and hope.

"You will come back?" she said tenderly.

"Very soon!" he replied, looking longingly into her blue eyes.

"And . . . you will remember? . . ." she asked, as her eyes, in response to his look, gave him an infinity of promise.

"I will always remember, Madame, that you have honoured me by commanding my services."

The words were cold and formal, but they did not chill her this time. Her woman's heart had read his, beneath the impassive mask his pride still forced him to wear.

He bowed to her again, then begged her leave to depart. She stood on one side whilst he jumped on to Sultan's back, then, as he galloped out of the gates, she waved him a final "Adieu."

A bend in the road soon hid him from view; his confidential groom had some difficulty in keeping pace with him, for Sultan flew along in response to his master's excited mood. Marguerite, with a sigh that was almost a happy one, turned and went within. She went back to her room, for suddenly, like a tired child, she felt quite sleepy.

Her heart seemed all at once to be in complete peace, and, though it still ached with undefined longing, a vague and delicious hope soothed it as with a balm.

She felt no longer anxious about Armand. The man who had just ridden away, bent on helping her brother, inspired her with complete confidence in his strength and in his power. She marvelled at herself for having ever looked upon him as an inane fool; of course, *that* was a mask worn to hide the bitter wound she had dealt to his faith and to his love. His passion would have overmastered him, and he would not let her see how much he still cared and how deeply he suffered.

But now all would be well: she would crush her own pride, humble it before him, tell him everything, trust him in everything; and those happy days would come back, when they used to wander off together in the forests of Fontainebleau, when they spoke little—for he was always a silent man—but when she felt that against that strong heart she would always find rest and happiness.

The more she thought of the events of the past night, the less fear had she of Chauvelin and his schemes. He had failed to discover the identity of the Scarlet Pimpernel, of that she felt sure. Both Lord Fancourt and Chauvelin himself had assured her that no one had been in the dining-room at one o'clock except the Frenchman himself and Percy—Yes!—Percy! she might have asked him, had she thought of it! Anyway, she had no fears that the unknown and brave hero would fall in Chauvelin's trap; his death at any rate would not be at her door.

Armand certainly was still in danger, but Percy had pledged his word that Armand would be safe, and somehow, as Marguerite had seen him riding away, the possibility that he could fail in whatever he undertook never even remotely crossed her mind. When Armand was safely over in England she would not allow him to go back to France.

She felt almost happy now, and, drawing the curtains closely together again to shut out the piercing sun, she went to bed at last, laid her head upon the pillow, and, like a wearied child, soon fell into a peaceful and dreamless sleep.

18

THE MYSTERIOUS DEVICE

The day was well advanced when Marguerite woke, refreshed by her long sleep. Louise had brought her some fresh milk and a dish of fruit, and she partook of this frugal breakfast with hearty appetite.

Thoughts crowded thick and fast in her mind as she munched her grapes; most of them went galloping away after the tall, erect figure of her husband, whom she had watched riding out of sight more than five hours ago.

In answer to her eager inquiries, Louise brought back the news that the groom had come home with Sultan, having left Sir Percy in London. The groom thought that his master was about to get on board his schooner, which was lying off just below London Bridge. Sir Percy had ridden thus far, had then met Briggs, the skipper of the *Day Dream*, and had sent the groom back to Richmond with Sultan and the empty saddle.

This news puzzled Marguerite more than ever. Where could Sir Percy be going just now in the *Day Dream*? On Armand's behalf, he had said. Well! Sir Percy had influential friends everywhere. Perhaps he was going to Greenwich, or . . . but Marguerite ceased to conjecture; all would be explained anon: he said that he would come back, and that he would remember.

A long, idle day lay before Marguerite. She was expecting the visit of her old school-fellow, little Suzanne de Tournay. With all the merry mischief at her command, she had tendered her request for Suzanne's company to the Comtesse in the presence of the Prince of Wales last night. His Royal Highness had loudly applauded the notion, and declared that he would give himself the pleasure of calling on the two ladies in the course of the afternoon. The Comtesse had not dared to refuse, and then and there was entrapped into a promise to send little Suzanne to spend a long and happy day at Richmond with her friend.

Marguerite expected her eagerly; she longed for a chat about old schooldays with the child; she felt that she would prefer Suzanne's company to that of anyone else, and together they would roam through the fine old garden and rich deer park, or stroll along the river.

But Suzanne had not come yet, and Marguerite being dressed, prepared to go downstairs. She looked quite a girl this morning in her simple muslin frock, with a broad blue sash round her slim waist, and the dainty cross-over fichu into which, at her bosom, she had fastened a few late crimson roses.

She crossed the landing outside her own suite of apartments, and stood still for a moment at the head of the fine oak staircase, which led to the lower floor. On her left were her husband's apartments, a suite of rooms which she practically never entered.

They consisted of bedroom, dressing and reception-room, and, at the extreme end of the landing, of a small study, which, when Sir Percy did not use it, was always kept locked. His own special and confidential valet, Frank, had charge of this room. No one was ever allowed to go inside. My lady had never cared to do so, and the other servants had, of course, not dared to break this hard-and-fast rule.

Marguerite had often, with that good-natured contempt which she had recently adopted towards her husband, chaffed him about the secrecy which surrounded his private study. Laughingly she had always declared that he strictly excluded all prying eyes from his sanctum for fear they should detect how very little "study" went on within its four walls: a comfortable arm-chair for Sir Percy's sweet slumbers was, no doubt, its most conspicuous piece of furniture.

Marguerite thought of all this on this bright October morning as she glanced along the corridor. Frank was evidently busy with his master's rooms, for most of the doors stood open, that of the study amongst the others.

A sudden, burning, childish curiosity seized her to have a peep at Sir Percy's sanctum. The restriction, of course, did not apply to her, and Frank would, of course, not dare to oppose her. Still, she hoped that the valet would be busy in one of the other rooms, that she might have that one quick peep in secret, and unmolested.

Gently, on tip-toe, she crossed the landing and, like Blue Beard's wife, trembling half with excitement and wonder, she paused a moment on the threshold, strangely perturbed and irresolute.

The door was ajar, and she could not see anything within. She pushed it open tentatively: there was no sound: Frank was evidently not there, and she walked boldly in.

At once she was struck by the severe simplicity of everything around her: the dark and heavy hangings, the massive oak furniture, the one or two maps on the wall, in no way recalled to her mind the lazy man about town, the lover of race-courses, the dandified leader of fashion, that was the outward representation of Sir Percy Blakeney.

There was no sign here, at any rate, of hurried departure. Everything was in its place, not a scrap of paper littered the floor, not a cupboard or drawer was left open. The curtains were drawn aside, and through the open window the fresh morning air was streaming in.

Facing the window, and well into the centre of the room, stood a ponderous business-like desk, which looked as if it had seen much service. On the wall to the left of the desk, reaching almost from floor to ceiling, was a large full-length portrait of a woman, magnificently framed, exquisitely painted, and signed with the name of Boucher. It was Percy's mother.

Marguerite knew very little about her, except that she had died abroad, ailing in body as well as in mind, when Percy was still a lad. She must have been a very beautiful woman once, when Boucher painted her, and as Marguerite looked at the portrait, she could not but be struck by the extraordinary resemblance which must have existed between mother and son. There was the same low, square forehead, crowned with thick, fair hair, smooth and heavy; the same deep-set, somewhat lazy blue eyes, beneath firmly-marked straight brows; and in those eyes there was the same intensity behind that apparent laziness, the same latent passion which used to light up Percy's face in the olden days before his marriage, and which Marguerite had again noted, last night at dawn, when she had come quite close to him, and had allowed a note of tenderness to creep into her voice.

Marguerite studied the portrait, for it interested her: after that she turned and looked again at the ponderous desk. It was covered with a mass of papers, all neatly tied and docketed, which looked like accounts and receipts arranged with perfect method.

It had never before struck Marguerite—nor had she, alas! found it worth while to inquire—as to how Sir Percy, whom all the world had credited with a total lack of brains, administered the vast fortune which his father had left him.

Since she had entered this neat, orderly room, she had been taken so much by surprise that this obvious proof of her husband's strong business capacities did not cause her more than a passing thought of wonder. But it also strengthened her in the now certain knowledge that, with his worldly inanities, his foppish ways, and foolish talk, he was not only wearing a mask, but was playing a deliberate and studied part.

Marguerite wondered again. Why should he take all this trouble? Why should he—who was obviously a serious, earnest man—wish to appear before his fellow-men as an empty-headed nincompoop?

He may have wished to hide his love for a wife who held him in contempt . . . but surely such an object could have been gained at less sacrifice, and with far less trouble than constant incessant acting of an unnatural part.

She looked round her quite aimlessly now: she was horribly puzzled, and a nameless dread, before all this strange, unaccountable mystery, had begun to seize upon her. She felt cold and uncomfortable suddenly in this severe and dark room. There were no pictures on the walls, save the fine Boucher portrait, only a couple of maps, both of parts of France, one of the North coast and the other of the environs of Paris. What did Sir Percy want with those, she wondered.

Her head began to ache, she turned away from this strange Blue Beard's chamber which she had entered, and which she did not understand. She did not wish

Frank to find her here, and with a last look round, she once more turned to the door. As she did so, her foot knocked against a small object, which had apparently been lying close to the desk, on the carpet, and which now went rolling right across the room.

She stooped to pick it up. It was a solid gold ring, with a flat shield, on which was engraved a small device.

Marguerite turned it over in her fingers, and then studied the engraving on the shield. It represented a small star-shaped flower, of a shape she had seen so distinctly twice before: once at the opera, and once at Lord Grenville's ball.

19

THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL

At what particular moment the strange doubt first crept into Marguerite's mind, she could not herself afterwards have said. With the ring tightly clutched in her hand, she had run out of the room, down the stairs, and out into the garden, where, in complete seclusion, alone with the flowers, and the river and the birds, she could look again at the ring, and study that device more closely.

Stupidly, senselessly, now, sitting beneath the shade of an overhanging sycamore, she was looking at the plain gold shield, with the star-shaped little flower engraved upon it.

Bah! It was ridiculous! she was dreaming! her nerves were overwrought, and she saw signs and mysteries in the most trivial coincidences. Had not everybody about town recently made a point of affect-ing the device of that mysterious and heroic Scarlet Pimpernel?

Did she not herself wear it embroidered on her gowns? set in gems and enamel in her hair? What was there strange in the fact that Sir Percy should have chosen to use the device as a seal-ring? He might easily have done that . . . yes . . . quite easily . . . and . . . besides . . . what connexion could there be between her exquisite dandy of a husband, with his fine clothes and refined lazy ways and the daring plotter who rescued French victims from beneath the very eyes of the leaders of a bloodthirsty revolution?

Her thoughts were in a whirl—her mind a blank. . . . She did not see anything that was going on around her, and was quite startled when a fresh young voice called to her across the garden.

"Chérie—chérie! where are you?" and little Suzanne, fresh as a rosebud, with eyes dancing with glee, and brown curls fluttering in the soft morning breeze, came running across the lawn.

"They told me you were in the garden," she went on prattling merrily and throwing herself with pretty girlish impulse into Marguerite's arms, "so I ran out to give you a surprise. You did not expect me quite so soon, did you, my darling little Margot chérie?"

Marguerite, who had hastily concealed the ring in the folds of her kerchief, tried to respond gaily and unconcernedly to the young girl's impulsiveness.

"Indeed, sweet one," she said with a smile, "it is delightful to have you all to myself, and for a nice whole long day. . . . You won't be bored?"

"Oh! bored! Margot, how *can* you say such a wicked thing. Why! when we were in the dear old convent together, we were always happy when we were allowed to be alone together."

"And to talk secrets."

The two young girls had linked their arms in one another's, and began wandering round the garden.

"Oh! how lovely your home is, Margot darling," said little Suzanne enthusiastically, "and how happy you must be!"

"Aye, indeed! I ought to be happy—oughtn't I, sweet one?" said Marguerite, with a wistful little sigh.

"How sadly you say it, chérie. . . . Ah, well, I suppose now that you are a married woman you won't care to talk secrets with me any longer. Oh! what lots and lots of secrets we used to have at school! Do you remember?—some we did not even confide to Sister Theresa of the Holy Angels—though she was such a dear."

"And now you have one all-important secret, eh, little one?" said Marguerite merrily, "which you are forthwith going to confide to me. Nay, you need not blush, chérie," she added, as she saw Suzanne's pretty little face crimson with blushes. "Faith, there's naught to be ashamed of! He is a noble and true man, and one to be proud of as a lover, and . . . as a husband."

"Indeed, chérie, I am not ashamed," rejoined Suzanne softly; "and it makes me very, very proud to hear you speak so well of him. I think maman will consent," she added thoughtfully, "and I shall be—oh! so happy—but, of course, nothing is to be thought of until papa is safe. . . ."

Marguerite started. Suzanne's father! the Comte de Tournay!—one of those whose life would be jeopardized if Chauvelin succeeded in establishing the identity of the Scarlet Pimpernel.

She had understood all from the Comtesse, and also from one or two of the members of the league, that their mysterious leader had pledged his honour to bring the fugitive Comte de Tournay safely out of France. Whilst little Suzanne—unconscious of all—save her own all-important little secret, went prattling on, Marguerite's thoughts went back to the events of the past night.

Armand's peril, Chauvelin's threat, his cruel "Either—or—" which she had accepted.

And then her own work in the matter, which should have culminated at one o'clock in Lord Grenville's dining-room, when the relentless agent of the French Government would finally learn who was this mysterious Scarlet Pimpernel, who so openly defied an army of spies and placed himself so boldly, and for mere sport, on the side of the enemies of France.

Since then she had heard nothing from Chauvelin. She had concluded that he had failed, and yet, she had not felt anxious about Armand, because her husband had promised that Armand would be safe.

But now, suddenly, as Suzanne prattled merrily along, an awful horror came upon her for what she had done. Chauvelin had told her nothing, it is true; but she remembered how sarcastic and evil he looked when she took final leave of him after the ball. Had he discovered something then? had he already laid his plans for catching the daring plotter red-handed, in France, and sending him to the guillotine without compunction or delay?

Marguerite turned sick with horror, and her hand convulsively clutched the ring in her dress.

"You are not listening, chérie," said Suzanne, reproachfully, as she paused in her long, highly-interesting narrative.

"Yes, yes, darling—indeed I am," said Marguerite with an effort, forcing herself to smile. "I love to hear you talking . . . and your happiness makes me so very glad. . . . Have no fear, we will manage to propitiate maman. Sir Andrew Ffoulkes is a noble English gentleman; he has money and position, the Comtesse will not refuse her consent. . . . But . . . now, little one . . . tell me . . . what is the latest news about your father?"

"Oh!" said Suzanne, with mad glee, "the best we could possibly hear. My Lord Hastings came to see maman early this morning. He said that all is now well with dear papa, and we may safely expect him here in England in less than four days."

"Yes," said Marguerite, whose glowing eyes were fastened on Suzanne's lips as she continued merrily—

"Oh, we have no fear now! You don't know, chérie, that that great and noble Scarlet Pimpernel himself has gone to save papa. He has gone, chérie . . . actually gone . . ." added Suzanne excitedly. "He was in London this morning; he will be in Calais, perhaps, to-morrow . . . where he will meet papa . . . and then . . . and then . . ."

The blow had fallen. She had expected it all along, though she had tried for the last half-hour to delude herself and to cheat her fears. He had gone to Calais, had been in London this morning . . . he . . . the Scarlet Pimpernel . . . Percy Blakeney . . . her husband . . . whom she had betrayed last night to Chauvelin. . . .

Percy . . . Percy . . . her husband . . . the Scarlet Pimpernel. . . . Oh! how could she have been so blind? She understood it now—all at once . . . that part he played—the mask he wore . . . in order to throw dust in everybody's eyes.

And all for sheer sport and devilry, of course—

saving men, women and children from death, as other men destroy and kill animals for the excitement, the love of the thing. The idle, rich man wanted some aim in life—he, and the few young bucks he enrolled under his banner, had amused themselves for months in risking their lives for the sake of an innocent few.

Perhaps he had meant to tell her when they were first married; and then the story of the Marquis de St. Cyr had come to his ears, and he had suddenly turned from her, thinking, no doubt, that she might some day betray him and his comrades, who had sworn to follow him; and so he had tricked her, as he tricked all others, whilst hundreds now owed their lives to him, and many families owed him both life and happiness.

The mask of the inane fop had been a good one, and the part consummately well played. No wonder that Chauvelin's spies had failed to detect, in the apparently brainless nincompoop, the man whose reckless daring and resourceful ingenuity had baffled the keenest French spies, both in France and in England. Even last night, when Chauvelin went to Lord Grenville's dining-room to seek that daring Scarlet Pimpernel, he only saw that inane Sir Percy Blakeney fast asleep in a corner of the sofa.

Had his astute mind guessed the secret, then? Here lay the whole awful, horrible, amazing puzzle. In betraying a nameless stranger to his fate in order to save her brother, had Marguerite Blakeney sent her husband to his death?

No! no! no! a thousand times no! Surely Fate could not deal a blow like that: Nature itself would rise in revolt: her hand, when it held that tiny scrap of paper last night, would surely have been struck numb ere it committed a deed so appalling and so terrible.

"But what is it, chérie?" said little Suzanne, now genuinely alarmed, for Marguerite's colour had become dull and ashen. "Are you ill, Marguerite? What is it?"

"Nothing, nothing, child," she murmured, as in a dream. "Wait a moment . . . let me think . . . think! . . . You said . . . the Scarlet Pimpernel had gone to-day . . . ?"

"Marguerite, chérie, what is it? You frighten me. . . ."

"It is nothing, child, I tell you . . . nothing. . . . I must be alone a minute—and—dear one . . . I may have to curtail our time together to-day. . . . I may have to go away—you'll understand?"

"I understand that something has happened, chérie, and that you want to be alone. I won't be a hindrance to you. Don't think of me. My maid, Lucile, has not yet gone . . . we will go back together . . . don't think of me."

She threw her arms impulsively round Marguerite. Child as she was, she felt the poignancy of her friend's grief, and with the infinite tact of her girlish tenderness, she did not try to pry into it, but was ready to efface herself.

She kissed Marguerite again and again, then walked sadly back across the lawn. Marguerite did not move, she remained there, thinking . . . wondering what was to be done.

Just as little Suzanne was about to mount the terrace steps, a groom came running round the house towards his mistress. He carried a sealed letter in his hand. Suzanne instinctively turned back; her heart told her that here perhaps was further ill news for her friend, and she felt that her poor Margot was not in a fit state to bear any more.

The groom stood respectfully beside his mistress, then he handed her the sealed letter.

"What is that?" asked Marguerite.

"Just come by runner, my lady."

Marguerite took the letter mechanically, and turned it over in her trembling fingers.

"Who sent it?" she said.

"The runner said, my lady," replied the groom, "that his orders were to deliver this, and that your ladyship would understand from whom it came."

Marguerite tore open the envelope. Already her instinct had told her what it contained, and her eyes only glanced at it mechanically.

It was a letter written by Armand St. Just to Sir Andrew Ffoulkes—the letter which Chauvelin's spies had stolen at *The Fisherman's Rest* and which Chauvelin had held as a rod over her to enforce her obedience.

Now he had kept his word—he had sent her back St. Just's compromising letter . . . for he was on the track of the Scarlet Pimpernel.

Marguerite's senses reeled, her very soul seemed to be leaving her body; she tottered, and would have fallen but for Suzanne's arm round her waist. With superhuman effort she regained control over herself—there was yet much to be done.

"Bring that runner here to me," she said to the servant, with much calm. "He has not gone?"

"No, my lady."

The groom went, and Marguerite turned to Suzanne.

"And you, child, run within. Tell Lucile to get ready. I fear I must send you home, child. And—stay, tell one of the maids to prepare a travelling-dress and cloak for me."

Suzanne made no reply. She kissed Marguerite tenderly, and obeyed without a word; the child was overawed by the terrible, nameless misery in her friend's face.

A minute later the groom returned, followed by the runner who had brought the letter.

"Who gave you this packet?" asked Marguerite.

"A gentleman, my lady," replied the man, "at *The Rose and Thistle* inn opposite Charing Cross. He said you would understand."

"At *The Rose and Thistle*? What was he doing?"

"He was waiting for the coach, your ladyship, which he had ordered."

"The coach?"

"Yes, my lady. A special coach he had ordered. I understood from his man that he was posting straight to Dover."

"That's enough. You may go." Then she turned to the groom: "My coach and the four swiftest horses in the stables, to be ready at once."

The groom and runner both went quickly off to obey. Marguerite remained standing for a moment on the lawn quite alone. Her graceful figure was as rigid as a statue, her eyes were fixed, her hands were tightly clasped across her breast: her lips moved as they murmured with pathetic heart-breaking persistence—

"What's to be done? What's to be done? Where to find him?—Oh, God! grant me light."

But this was not the moment for remorse and despair.

She had done—unwittingly—an awful and terrible thing—the very worst crime, in her eyes, that woman ever committed—she saw it in all its horror. Her very blindness in not having guessed her husband's secret seemed now to her another deadly sin. She ought to have known! she ought to have known!

How could she imagine that a man who could love with so much intensity as Percy Blakeney had loved her from the first?—how could such a man be the brainless idiot he chose to appear? She, at least, ought to have known that he was wearing a mask, and having found that out, she should have torn it from his face, whenever they were alone together.

Her love for him had been paltry and weak, easily crushed by her own pride; and she, too, had worn a mask in assuming a contempt for him, whilst, as a matter of fact, she completely misunderstood him.

But there was no time now to go over the past. By her own blindness she had sinned; now she must repay, not by empty remorse, but by prompt and useful action.

Percy had started for Calais, utterly unconscious of the fact that his most relentless enemy was on his heels. He had set sail early that morning from London Bridge. Provided he had a favourable wind, he would no doubt be in France within twenty-four hours; no doubt he had reckoned on the wind and chosen this route.

Chauvelin, on the other hand, would post to Dover, charter a vessel there, and undoubtedly reach Calais much about the same time. Once in Calais, Percy would meet all those who were eagerly waiting for the noble and brave Scarlet Pimpernel, who had come to rescue them from horrible and unmerited death. With Chauvelin's eyes now fixed upon his every movement, Percy would thus not only be endangering his own life, but that of Suzanne's father, the old Comte de Tournay, and of those other fugitives who were waiting for him and trusting in him. There was also Armand, who had gone to meet de Tournay, secure in the knowledge that the Scarlet Pimpernel was watching over his safety.

All these lives, and that of her husband, lay in Marguerite's hands; these she must save, if human pluck and ingenuity were equal to the task.

Unfortunately, she could not do all this quite alone. Once in Calais she would not know where to find her husband, whilst Chauvelin, in stealing the papers at Dover, had obtained the whole itinerary. Above everything, she wished to warn Percy.

She knew enough about him by now to understand that he would never abandon those who trusted in him, that he would not turn back from danger, and leave the Comte de Tournay to fall into the bloodthirsty hands that knew of no mercy. But if he were warned, he might form new plans, be more wary, more prudent. Unconsciously, he might fall into a cunning trap, but—once warned—he might yet succeed.

And if he failed—if indeed Fate, and Chauvelin, with all the resources at his command, proved too strong for the daring plotter after all—then at least she should be there by his side, to comfort, love and cherish, to cheat death perhaps at the last by making it seem sweet, if they died both together, locked in each other's arms, with the supreme happiness of knowing that passion had responded to passion, and that all misunderstandings were at an end.

Her whole body stiffened as with a great and firm resolution. This she meant to do, if God gave her wits and strength. Her eyes lost their fixed look; they glowed with inward fire at the thought of meeting him again so soon, in the very midst of most deadly perils; they sparkled with the joy of sharing these dangers with him—of helping him perhaps—of being with him at the last—if she failed.

The childlike sweet face had become hard and set, the curved mouth was closed tightly over her clenched teeth. She meant to do or die, with him and for his sake. A frown, which spoke of an iron will and unbending resolution, appeared between the two straight brows; already her plans were formed. She would go and find Sir Andrew Ffoulkes first; he was Percy's best friend, and Marguerite remembered with a thrill, with what blind enthusiasm the young man always spoke of his mysterious leader.

He would help her where she needed help; her coach was ready. A change of raiment, and a farewell to little Suzanne, and she could be on her way.

Without haste, but without hesitation, she walked quietly into the house.

20

THE FRIEND

Less than half an hour later, Marguerite, buried in thoughts, sat inside her coach, which was bearing her swiftly to London.

She had taken an affectionate farewell of little Suzanne, and seen the child safely started with her maid, and in her own coach, back to town. She had sent one courier with a respectful letter of excuse to His Royal Highness, begging for a postponement of the august visit on account of pressing and urgent business, and another on ahead to bespeak a fresh relay of horses at Faversham.

Then she had changed her muslin frock for a dark travelling costume and mantle, had provided herself with money—which her husband's lavishness always placed fully at her disposal—and had started on her way.

She did not attempt to delude herself with any vain and futile hopes; the safety of her brother Armand was to have been conditional on the imminent capture of the Scarlet Pimpernel. As Chauvelin had sent her back Armand's compromising letter, there was no doubt that he was quite satisfied in his own mind that Percy Blakeney was the man whose death he had sworn to bring about.

No! there was no room for any fond delusions! Percy, the husband whom she loved with all the ardour which her admiration for his bravery had kindled, was in immediate, deadly peril, through her hand. She had betrayed him to his enemy—unwittingly 'tis true—but she *had* betrayed him, and if Chauvelin succeeded in trapping him, who so far was unaware of his danger, then his death would be at her door. His death! when with her very heart's blood she would have defended him and given willingly her life for his.

She had ordered her coach to drive her to the *Crown* inn; once there, she told her coachman to give the horses food and rest. Then she ordered a chair, and had herself carried to the house in Pall Mall where Sir Andrew Ffoulkes lived.

Among all Percy's friends, who were enrolled under his daring banner, she felt that she would prefer to confide in Sir Andrew Ffoulkes. He had always been her friend, and now his love for little Suzanne had brought him closer to her still. Had he been away from home, gone on the mad errand with Percy, perhaps, then she would have called on Lord Hastings or Lord Tony—for she wanted the help of one of these young men, or she would be indeed powerless to save her husband.

Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, however, was at home, and his servant introduced her ladyship immediately. She went upstairs to the young man's comfortable bachelor's chambers, and was shown into a small, though luxuriously furnished, dining-room. A moment or two later Sir Andrew himself appeared.

He had evidently been much startled when he heard who his lady visitor was, for he looked anxiously—even suspiciously—at Marguerite, whilst performing the elaborate bows before her, which the rigid etiquette of the time demanded.

Marguerite had laid aside every vestige of nervousness; she was perfectly calm, and having returned the young man's elaborate salute, she began very calmly—

"Sir Andrew, I have no desire to waste valuable time in much talk. You must take certain things I am going to tell you for granted. These will be of no importance. What is important is, that your leader and comrade, the Scarlet Pimpernel . . . my husband . . . Percy Blakeney . . . is in deadly peril."

Had she had the remotest doubt of the correctness of her deductions, she would have had them confirmed now, for Sir Andrew, completely taken by surprise, had grown very pale, and was quite incapable of making the slightest attempt at clever parrying.

"No matter how I know this, Sir Andrew," she continued quietly; "thank God that I do, and that perhaps it is not too late to save him. Unfortunately, I cannot do this quite alone, and therefore have come to you for help."

"Lady Blakeney," said the young man, trying to recover himself, "I . . ."

"Will you hear me first?" she interrupted, "this is how the matter stands. When the agent of the French Government stole your papers that night in Dover, he found amongst them certain plans which you or your leader meant to carry out for the rescue of the Comte de Tournay and others. The Scarlet Pimpernel—Percy, my husband—has gone on this errand himself to-day. Chauvelin knows that the Scarlet Pimpernel and Percy Blakeney are one and the same person. He will follow him to Calais, and there will lay hands on him. You know as well as I do the fate that awaits him at the hands of the Revolutionary Government of France. No interference from England—from King George himself—would save him. Robespierre and his gang would see to it that the interference came too late. But not only that, the much-trusted leader will also have been unconsciously the means of revealing the hiding-place of the Comte de Tournay and of all those who, even now, are placing their hopes in him."

She had spoken quietly, dispassionately, and with firm, unbending resolution. Her purpose was to make that young man trust and help her, for she could do nothing without him.

"I do not understand," he repeated, trying to gain time, to think what was best to be done.

"Aye! but I think you do, Sir Andrew. You must know that I am speaking the truth. Look these facts straight in the face. Percy has sailed for Calais, I presume for some lonely part of the coast, and Chauvelin is on his track. *He* has posted for Dover, and will cross the Channel probably to-night. What do you think will happen?"

The young man was silent.

"Percy will arrive at his destination: unconscious of being followed, he will seek out de Tournay and the others—among these is Armand St. Just, my brother—he will seek them out, one after another, probably, not knowing that the sharpest eyes in the world are watching his every movement. When he has thus unconsciously betrayed those who blindly trust in him, when nothing can be gained from him, and he is ready to come back to England, with those whom he has gone so bravely to save, the doors of the trap will close upon him, and he will be sent to end his noble life upon the guillotine."

Still Sir Andrew was silent.

"You do not trust me," she said passionately. "Oh, God! cannot you see that I am in deadly earnest? Man, man," she added, while with her tiny hands she seized the young man suddenly by the shoulders, forcing him to look straight at her, "tell me, do I look like that vilest thing on earth—a woman who would betray her own husband?"

"God forbid, Lady Blakeney," said the young man at last, "that I should attribute such evil motives to you, but . . ."

"But what? . . . tell me. . . . Quick, man! . . . the very seconds are precious!"

"Will you tell me," he asked resolutely, and looking searchingly into her blue eyes, "whose hand helped to guide M. Chauvelin to the knowledge which you say he possesses?"

"Mine," she said quietly, "I own it—I will not lie to you, for I wish you to trust me absolutely. But I had no idea—how *could* I have—of the identity of the Scarlet Pimpernel . . . and my brother's safety was to be my prize if I succeeded."

"In helping Chauvelin to track the Scarlet Pimpernel?"

She nodded.

"It is no use telling you how he forced my hand. Armand is more than a brother to me, and . . . and . . . how *could* I guess? . . . But we waste time, Sir Andrew . . . every second is precious . . . in the name of God! . . . my husband is in peril . . . your friend!—your comrade!—Help me to save him."

Sir Andrew felt his position to be a very awkward one. The oath he had taken before his leader and comrade was one of obedience and secrecy; and yet the beautiful woman, who was asking him to trust her, was undoubtedly in earnest; his friend and leader was equally undoubtedly in imminent danger, and . . .

"Lady Blakeney," he said at last, "God knows you have perplexed me so that I do not know which way my duty lies. Tell me what you wish me to do. There are nineteen of us ready to lay down our lives for the Scarlet Pimpernel if he is in danger."

"There is no need for lives just now, my friend," she said drily, "my wits and four swift horses will serve the necessary purpose. But I must know where to find him. See," she added, while her eyes filled with tears, "I have humbled myself before you, I have owned my fault to you; shall I also confess my weakness?—My husband and I have been estranged, because he did not trust me, and because I was too blind to understand. You must confess that the bandage which he put over my eyes was a very thick one. Is it small wonder that I did not see through it? But last night, after I led him unwittingly into such deadly peril, it suddenly fell from my eyes. If you will not help me, Sir Andrew, I would still strive to save my husband, I would still exert every faculty I possess for his sake; but I might be powerless, for I might arrive too late, and nothing would be left for you but lifelong remorse, and . . . and . . . for me, a broken heart."

"But, Lady Blakeney," said the young man, touched by the gentle earnestness of this exquisitely beautiful woman, "do you know that what you propose to do is man's work?—you cannot possibly journey to Calais alone. You would be running the greatest possible risks to yourself, and your chances of finding your husband now—were I to direct you ever so carefully—are infinitely remote."

"Oh, I hope there are risks!" she murmured softly. "I hope there are dangers, too!—I have so much to atone for. But I fear you are mistaken. Chauvelin's eyes are fixed upon you all; he will scarce notice me. Quick, Sir Andrew!—the coach is ready, and there is not a moment to be lost. . . . I *must* get to him! I *must*!" she repeated with almost savage energy, "to warn him that that man is on his track. . . . Can't you see—can't you see, that I *must* get to him . . . even . . . even if it be too late to save him . . . at least . . . to be by his side . . . at the last."

"Faith, Madame, you must command me. Gladly would I or any of my comrades lay down our lives for your husband. If you *will* go yourself . . ."

"Nay, friend, do you not see that I would go mad if I let you go without me?" She stretched out her hand to him. "You *will* trust me?"

"I await your orders," he said simply.

"Listen then. My coach is ready to take me to Dover. Do you follow me, as swiftly as horses will take you. We meet at nightfall at *The Fisherman's Rest*. Chauvelin would avoid it, as he is known there, and I think it would be the safest. I will gladly accept your escort to Calais . . . as you say, I might miss Sir Percy were you to direct me ever so carefully. We'll charter a schooner at Dover, and cross over during the night. Disguised, if you will agree to it, as my lacquey, you will, I think, escape detection."

"I am entirely at your service, Madame," rejoined the young man earnestly. "I trust to God that you will sight the *Day Dream* before we reach Calais. With Chauvelin at his heels, every step the Scarlet Pimpernel takes on French soil is fraught with danger."

"God grant it, Sir Andrew. But now, farewell. We meet to-night at Dover! It will be a race between Chauvelin and me across the Channel to-night—and the prize—the life of the Scarlet Pimpernel."

He kissed her hand, and then escorted her to her chair. A quarter of an hour later she was back at the *Crown* inn, where her coach and horses were ready and waiting for her. The next moment they thundered along the London streets, and then straight on to the Dover road at maddening speed.

She had no time for despair now. She was up and doing and had no leisure to think. With Sir Andrew Ffoulkes as her companion and ally, hope had once again revived in her heart.

God would be merciful. He would not allow so appalling a crime to be committed, as the death of a brave man through the hand of a woman who loved him, and worshipped him, and who would gladly have died for his sake.

Marguerite's thoughts flew back to him, the mysterious hero, whom she had always unconsciously loved when his identity was still unknown to her. Laughingly, in the olden days, she used to call him the shadowy king of her heart, and now she had suddenly found that this enigmatic personality whom she had worshipped, and the man who loved her so passionately, were one and the same; what wonder that one or two happier Visions began to force their way before her mind? She vaguely wondered what she would say to him when first they would stand face to face.

She had had so many anxieties, so much excitement during the past few hours, that she now allowed herself the luxury of nursing these few more hopeful, brighter thoughts.

Gradually the rumble of the coach wheels, with its incessant monotony, acted soothingly on her nerves: her eyes, aching with fatigue and many shed and unshed tears, closed involuntarily, and she fell into a troubled sleep.

21

SUSPENSE

It was late into the night when she at last reached *The Fisherman's Rest.* She had done the whole journey in less than eight hours, thanks to innumerable changes of horses at the various coaching stations, for which she always paid lavishly, thus obtaining the very best and swiftest that could be had.

Her coachman, too, had been indefatigable; the promise of special and rich reward had no doubt helped to keep him up, and he had literally burned the ground beneath his mistress' coach wheels.

The arrival of Lady Blakeney in the middle of the night caused a considerable flutter at *The Fisherman's Rest.* Sally jumped hastily out of bed, and Mr. Jellyband was at great pains how to make his important guest comfortable.

Both these good folk were far too well drilled in the manners appertaining to innkeepers, to exhibit the slightest surprise at Lady Blakeney's arrival, alone, at this extraordinary hour. No doubt they thought all the more, but Marguerite was far too absorbed in the importance—the deadly earnestness—of her journey, to stop and ponder over trifles of that sort.

The coffee-room—the scene lately of the dastardly outrage on two English gentlemen—was quite deserted. Mr. Jellyband hastily relit the lamp, rekindled a cheerful bit of fire in the great hearth, and then wheeled a comfortable chair by it, into which Marguerite gratefully sank.

"Will your ladyship stay the night?" asked pretty Miss Sally, who was already busy laying a snow-white cloth on the table, preparatory to providing a simple supper for her ladyship.

"No! not the whole night," replied Marguerite. "At any rate, I shall not want any room but this, if I can have it to myself for an hour or two."

"It is at your ladyship's service," said honest Jellyband, whose rubicund face was set in its tightest folds, lest it should betray before "the quality" that boundless astonishment which the worthy fellow had begun to feel.

"I shall be crossing over at the first turn of the tide," said Marguerite, "and in the first schooner I can get. But my coachman and men will stay the night, and probably several days longer, so I hope you will make them comfortable."

"Yes, my lady; I'll look after them. Shall Sally bring your ladyship some supper?"

"Yes, please. Put something cold on the table, and as soon as Sir Andrew Ffoulkes comes, show him in here."

"Yes, my lady."

Honest Jellyband's face now expressed distress in spite of himself. He had great regard for Sir Percy Blakeney, and did not like to see his lady running away with young Sir Andrew. Of course, it was no business of his, and Mr. Jellyband was no gossip. Still, in his heart, he recollected that her ladyship was after all only one of them "furriners"; what wonder that she was immoral like the rest of them?

"Don't sit up, honest Jellyband," continued Marguerite kindly, "nor you either, Mistress Sally. Sir Andrew may be late."

Jellyband was only too willing that Sally should go to bed. He was beginning not to like these goings-on at all. Still, Lady Blakeney would pay handsomely for the accommodation, and it certainly was no business of his.

Sally arranged a simple supper of cold meat, wine, and fruit on the table, then with a respectful curtsy, she retired, wondering in her little mind why her ladyship looked so serious, when she was about to elope with her gallant.

Then commenced a period of weary waiting for Marguerite. She knew that Sir Andrew—who would have to provide himself with clothes befitting a lacquey—could not possibly reach Dover for at least a couple of hours. He was a splendid horseman, of course, and would make light in such an emergency of the seventy odd miles between London and Dover. He would, too, literally burn the ground beneath his horse's hoofs, but he might not always get very good remounts, and in any case he could not have started from London until at least an hour after she did.

She had seen nothing of Chauvelin on the road. Her coachman, whom she questioned, had not seen anyone answering the description his mistress gave him of the wizened figure of the little Frenchman.

Evidently, therefore, he had been ahead of her all the time. She had not dared to question the people at the various inns where they had stopped to change horses. She feared that Chauvelin had spies all along the route who might overhear her questions, then outdistance her and warn her enemy of her approach.

Now she wondered at what inn he might be stopping, or whether he had had the good luck of chartering a vessel already, and was now himself on the way to France. That thought gripped her at the heart as with an iron vice. If indeed she should be too late already!

The loneliness of the room overwhelmed her; everything within was so horribly still; the ticking of the grandfather's clock—dreadfully slow and measured—was the only sound which broke this awful loneliness.

Marguerite had need of all her energy, all her steadfastness of purpose, to keep up her courage through this weary midnight waiting.

Every one else in the house but herself must have been asleep. She had heard Sally go upstairs. Mr. Jellyband had gone to see to her coachman and men, and then had returned and taken up a position under the porch outside, just where Marguerite had first met Chauvelin about a week ago. He evidently meant to wait up for Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, but was soon overcome by sweet slumbers, for presently—in addition to the slow ticking of the clock—Marguerite could hear the monotonous and dulcet tones of the worthy fellow's breathing.

For some time now, she had realized that the beautiful warm October's day, so happily begun, had turned into a rough and cold night. She had felt very chilly, and was glad of the cheerful blaze in the hearth: but gradually, as time wore on, the weather became more rough, and the sound of the great breakers against the Admiralty Pier, though some distance from the inn, came to her as the noise of muffled thunder.

The wind was becoming boisterous, rattling the leaded windows and the massive doors of the old-fashioned house: it shook the trees outside and roared down the vast chimney. Marguerite wondered if the wind would be favourable for her journey. She had no fear of the storm, and would have braved worse risks sooner than delay the crossing by an hour.

A sudden commotion outside roused her from her meditations. Evidently it was Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, just arrived in mad haste, for she heard his horse's hoofs thundering on the flagstones outside, then Mr. Jellyband's sleepy yet cheerful tones bidding him welcome.

For a moment, then, the awkwardness of her position struck Marguerite; alone at this hour, in a place where she was well known, and having made an assignation with a young cavalier equally well known, and who arrives in disguise! What food for gossip to those mischievously inclined.

The idea struck Marguerite chiefly from its humorous side: there was such quaint contrast between the seriousness of her errand, and the construction which would naturally be put on her actions by honest Mr. Jellyband, that, for the first time since many hours, a little smile began playing round the corners of her childlike mouth, and when, presently, Sir Andrew, almost unrecognizable in his lacquey-like garb, entered the coffee-room, she was able to greet him with quite a merry laugh.

"Faith! Monsieur, my lacquey," she said, "I am satisfied with your appearance!"

Mr. Jellyband had followed Sir Andrew, looking strangely perplexed. The young gallant's disguise had confirmed his worst suspicions. Without a smile upon his jovial face, he drew the cork from the bottle of wine, set the chairs ready, and prepared to wait.

"Thanks, honest friend," said Marguerite, who was still smiling at the thought of what the worthy fellow must be thinking at that very moment, "we shall require nothing more: and here's for all the trouble you have been put to on our account."

She handed two or three gold pieces to Jellyband, who took them respectfully, and with becoming gratitude.

"Stay, Lady Blakeney," interposed Sir Andrew, as Jellyband was about to retire, "I am afraid we shall require something more of my friend Jelly's hospitality. I am sorry to say we cannot cross over to-night."

"Not cross over to-night?" she repeated in amazement. "But we must, Sir Andrew, we must! There can be no question of cannot, and whatever it may cost, we must get a vessel to-night."

But the young man shook his head sadly.

"I am afraid it is not a question of cost, Lady Blakeney. There is a nasty storm blowing from France, the wind is dead against us, we cannot possibly sail until it has changed."

Marguerite became deadly pale. She had not foreseen this. Nature herself was playing her a horrible, cruel trick. Percy was in danger, and she could not go to him, because the wind happened to blow from the coast of France.

"But we must go!—we must!" she repeated with strange, persistent energy, "you know, we must go!—can't you find a way?"

"I have been down to the shore already," he said, "and had a talk to one or two skippers. It is quite impossible to set sail to-night, so every sailor assured me. No one," he added, looking significantly at Marguerite, "*no one* could possibly put out of Dover to-night."

Marguerite at once understood what he meant. *No* *one* included Chauvelin as well as herself. She nodded pleasantly to Jellyband.

"Well, then, I must resign myself," she said to him. "Have you a room for me?"

"Oh, yes, your ladyship. A nice, bright, airy room. I'll see to it at once. . . . And there is another one for Sir Andrew—both quite ready."

"That's brave now, mine honest Jelly," said Sir Andrew gaily, and clapping his worthy host vigorously on the back. "You unlock both those rooms, and leave our candles here on the dresser. I vow you are dead with sleep, and her ladyship must have some supper before she retires. There, have no fear, friend of the rueful countenance, her ladyship's visit, though at this unusual hour, is a great honour to thy house, and Sir Percy Blakeney will reward thee doubly, if thou seest well to her privacy and comfort."

Sir Andrew had no doubt guessed the many conflicting doubts and fears which raged in honest Jellyband's head: and, as he was a gallant gentleman, he tried by this brave hint to allay some of the worthy innkeeper's suspicions. He had the satisfaction of seeing that he had partially succeeded. Jellyband's rubicund countenance brightened somewhat at mention of Sir Percy's name.

"I'll go and see to it at once, sir," he said with alacrity, and with less frigidity in his manner. "Has her ladyship everything she wants for supper?"

"Everything, thanks, honest friend, and as I am famished and dead with fatigue, I pray you see to the rooms."

"Now tell me," she said eagerly, as soon as Jellyband had gone from the room, "tell me all your news."

"There is nothing else much to tell you, Lady

Blakeney," replied the young man. "The storm makes it quite impossible for any vessel to put out of Dover this tide. But, what seemed to you at first a terrible calamity, is really a blessing in disguise. If we cannot cross over to France to-night, Chauvelin is in the same quandary."

"He may have left before the storm broke out."

"God grant he may," said Sir Andrew, merrily, "for very likely then he'll have been driven out of his course! Who knows? He may now even by lying at the bottom of the sea, for there is a furious storm raging, and it will fare ill with a small craft which happens to be out. But I fear me we cannot build our hopes upon the shipwreck of that cunning devil, and of all his murderous plans. The sailors I spoke to, all assured me that no schooner had put out of Dover for several hours: on the other hand, I ascertained that a stranger had arrived by coach this afternoon, and had, like myself, made some inquiries about crossing over to France."

"Then Chauvelin is still in Dover?"

"Undoubtedly. Shall I go waylay him and run my sword through him? That were indeed the quickest way out of the difficulty."

"Nay! Sir Andrew, do not jest! Alas! I have often since last night caught myself wishing for that fiend's death. But what you suggest is impossible! The laws of this country do not permit of murder! It is only in our beautiful France that wholesale slaughter is done lawfully, in the name of Liberty and of brotherly love."

Sir Andrew had persuaded her to sit down to the table, to partake of some supper and to drink a little wine. This enforced rest of at least twelve hours, until the next tide, was sure to be terribly difficult to bear in the state of intense excitement in which she was. Obedient in these small matters like a child, Marguerite tried to eat and drink.

Sir Andrew, with that profound sympathy born in all those who are in love, made her almost happy by talking to her about her husband. He recounted to her some of the daring escapes the brave Scarlet Pimpernel had contrived for the poor French fugitives whom a relentless and bloody revolution was driving out of their country. He made her eyes glow with enthusiasm by telling her of his bravery, his ingenuity, his resourcefuness, when it meant snatching the lives of men, women, and even children from beneath the very edge of that murderous, ever-ready guillotine.

He even made her smile quite merrily by telling her of the Scarlet Pimpernel's quaint and many disguises, through which he had baffled the strictest watch set against him at the barricades of Paris. This last time the escape of the Comtesse de Tournay and her children had been a veritable masterpiece—and Blakeney disguised as a hideous old market-woman, in filthy cap and straggling grey locks, was a sight fit to make the gods laugh.

Marguerite laughed heartily as Sir Andrew tried to describe Blakeney's appearance, whose gravest difficulty always consisted in his great height, which in France made disguise doubly difficult.

Thus an hour wore on. There were many more to spend in enforced inactivity in Dover. Marguerite rose from the table with an impatient sigh. She looked forward with dread to the night in the bed upstairs, with terribly anxious thoughts to keep her company, and the howling of the storm to helpchase sleep away.

She wondered where Percy was now. The *Day*

Dream was a strong, well-built, sea-going yacht. Sir Andrew had expressed the opinion that no doubt she had got in the lee of the wind before the storm broke out, or else perhaps had not ventured into the open at all, but was lying quietly at Gravesend.

Briggs was an expert skipper, and Sir Percy handled a schooner as well as any master mariner. There was no danger for them from the storm.

It was long past midnight when at last Marguerite retired to rest. As she had feared, sleep sedulously avoided her eyes. Her thoughts were of the blackest during these long, weary hours, whilst that incessant storm raged which was keeping her away from Percy. The sound of the distant breakers made her heart ache with melancholy. She was in the mood when the sea has a saddening effect upon the nerves. It is only when we are very happy, that we can bear to gaze merrily upon the vast and limitless expanse of water, rolling on and on with such persistent, irritating monotony to the accompaniment of our thoughts, whether grave or gay. When they are gay, the waves echo their gaiety; but when they are sad, then every breaker, as it rolls, seems to bring additional sadness, and to speak to us of hopelessness and of the pettiness of all our joys.

22

CALAIS

The weariest nights, the longest days, sooner or later must perforce come to an end.

Marguerite had spent over fifteen hours in such acute mental torture as wellnigh drove her crazy. After a sleepless night, she rose early, wild with excitement, dying to start on her journey, terrified lest further obstacles lay in her way. She rose before anyone else in the house was astir, so frightened was she, lest she should miss the one golden opportunity of making a start.

When she came downstairs, she found Sir Andrew Ffoulkes sitting in the coffee-room. He had been out half an hour earlier, and had gone to the Admiralty Pier, only to find that neither the French packet nor any privately chartered vessel could put out of Dover yet. The storm was then at its fullest, and the tide was on the turn. If the wind did not abate or change, they would perforce have to wait another ten or twelve hours until the next tide, before a start could be made. And the storm had not abated, the wind had not changed, and the tide was rapidly drawing out.

Marguerite felt the sickness of despair when she heard this melancholy news. Only the most firm resolution kept her from totally breaking down, and thus adding to the young man's anxiety, which evidently had become very keen.

Though he tried to disguise it, Marguerite could see that Sir Andrew was just as anxious as she was to reach his comrade and friend. This enforced inactivity was terrible to them both.

How they spent that wearisome day at Dover, Marguerite could never afterwards say. She was in terror of showing herself, lest Chauvelin's spies happened to be about, so she had a private sitting-room, and she and Sir Andrew sat there hour after hour, trying to take, at long intervals, some perfunctory meals, which little Sally would bring them, with nothing to do but to think, to conjecture, and only occasionally to hope.

The storm had abated just too late; the tide was by then too far out to allow a vessel to put off to sea. The wind had changed, and was settling down to a comfortable north-westerly breeze—a veritable godsend for a speedy passage across to France.

And there those two waited, wondering if the hour would ever come when they could finally make a start. There had been one happy interval in this long weary day, and that was when Sir Andrew went down once again to the pier, and presently came back to tell Marguerite that he had chartered a quick schooner, whose skipper was ready to put to sea the moment the tide was favourable.

From that moment the hours seemed less wearisome; there was less hopelessness in the waiting, and at last, at five o'clock in the afternoon, Marguerite, closely veiled and followed by Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, who, in the guise of her lacquey, was carrying a number of impedimenta, found her way down to the pier.

Once on board, the keen, fresh sea-air revived her; the breeze was just strong enough to nicely swell the sails of the *Foam Crest*, as she cut her way merrily towards the open.

The sunset was glorious after the storm, and Marguerite, as she watched the white cliffs of Dover gradually disappearing from view, felt more at peace, and once more almost hopeful.

Sir Andrew was full of kind attentions, and she felt how lucky she had been to have him by her side in this, her great trouble.

Gradually the grey coast of France began to emerge from the fast-gathering evening mists. One or two lights could be seen flickering, and the spires of several churches to rise out of the surrounding haze.

Half an hour later Marguerite had landed upon the

French shore. She was back in that country where at this very moment men slaughtered their fellow-creatures by the hundreds, and sent innocent women and children in thousands to the block.

The very aspect of the country and its people, even in this remote sea-coast town, spoke of that seething revolution, three hundred miles away, in beautiful Paris, now rendered hideous by the constant flow of the blood of her noblest sons, by the wailing of the widows, and the cries of fatherless children.

The men all wore red caps—in various stages of cleanliness—but all with the tricolour cockade pinned on the left-hand side. Marguerite noticed with a shudder that instead of the laughing, merry countenances habitual to her own countrymen, their faces now invariably wore a look of sly distrust.

Every man nowadays was a spy upon his fellows: the most innocent word uttered in jest might at any time be brought up as a proof of aristocratic tendencies, or of treachery against the people. Even the women went about with a curious look of fear and of hate lurking in their brown eyes, and all watched Marguerite as she stepped on shore, followed by Sir Andrew, and murmured as she passed along: "Sacrés aristos!" or else "Sacrés Anglais!"

Otherwise their presence excited no further comment. Calais, even in those days, was in constant business communication with England, and English merchants were often to be seen on this coast. It was well known that in view of the heavy duties in England, a vast deal of French wines and brandies were smuggled across. This pleased the French *bourgeois* immensely; he liked to see the English Government and the English king, both of whom he hated, cheated out of their revenues, and an English smuggler was always a welcome guest at the tumble-down taverns of Calais and Boulogne.

So, perhaps, as Sir Andrew gradually directed Marguerite through the tortuous streets of Calais, many of the population, who turned with an oath to look at the strangers clad in the English fashion, thought that they were bent on purchasing dutiable articles for their own fog-ridden country, and gave them no more than a passing thought.

Marguerite, however, wondered how her husband's tall, massive figure could have passed through Calais unobserved: she marvelled what disguise he assumed to do his noble work, without exciting too much attention.

Without exchanging more than a few words, Sir Andrew was leading her right across the town, to the other side from that where they had landed, and on the way towards Cap Griz Nez. The streets were narrow, tortuous, and mostly evil-smelling, with a mixture of stale fish and damp cellar odours. There had been heavy rain during the storm last night, and sometimes Marguerite sank ankle-deep in the mud, for the roads were not lighted save by the occasional glimmer from a lamp inside a house.

But she did not heed any of these petty discomforts: "We may meet Blakeney at the *Chat Gris*," Sir Andrew had said, when they landed, and she was walking as if on a carpet of rose-leaves, for she was going to meet him almost at once.

At last they reached their destination. Sir Andrew evidently knew the road, for he had walked unerringly in the dark, and had not asked his way from anyone. It was too dark then for Marguerite to notice the outside aspect of this house. The *Chat Gris*, as Sir Andrew had called it, was evidently a small wayside inn on the outskirts of Calais, and on the way to Griz Nez. It lay some little distance from the coast, for the sound of the sea seemed to come from afar.

Sir Andrew knocked at the door with the knob of his cane, and from within Marguerite heard a sort of grunt and the muttering of a number of oaths. Sir Andrew knocked again, this time more peremptorily: more oaths were heard, and then shuffling steps seemed to draw near the door. Presently this was thrown open, and Marguerite found herself on the threshold of the most dilapidated, most squalid room she had ever seen in all her life.

The paper, such as it was, was hanging from the walls in strips; there did not seem to be a single piece of furniture in the room that could, by the wildest stretch of imagination, be called "whole." Most of the chairs had broken backs, others had no seats to them, one corner of the table was propped up with a bundle of faggots, there where the fourth leg had been broken.

In one corner of the room there was a huge hearth, over which hung a stock-pot, with a not altogether unpalatable odour of hot soup emanating therefrom. On one side of the room, high up in the wall, there was a species of loft, before which hung a tattered blue-and-white checked curtain. A rickety set of steps led up to this loft.

On the great bare walls, with their colourless paper, all stained with varied filth, there were chalked up at intervals in great bold characters, the words: "Liberté—Egalité—Fraternité."

The whole of this sordid abode was dimly lighted by an evil-smelling oil-lamp, which hung from the rickety rafters of the ceiling. It all looked so horribly squalid, so dirty and uninviting, that Marguerite hardly dared to cross the threshold.

Sir Andrew, however, had stepped unhesitatingly forward.

"English travellers, citoyen!" he said boldly, and speaking in French.

The individual who had come to the door in response to Sir Andrew's knock, and who, presumably, was the owner of this squalid abode, was an elderly, heavily-built peasant, dressed in a dirty blue blouse, heavy sabots, from which wisps of straw protruded all round, shabby blue trousers, and the inevitable red cap with the tricolour cockade, that proclaimed his momentary political views. He carried a short wooden pipe, from which the odour of rank tobacco emanated. He looked with some suspicion and a great deal of contempt at the two travellers, muttered "Sacrrrées Anglais!" and spat upon the ground to further show his independence of spirit, but, nevertheless, he stood aside to let them enter, no doubt well aware that these same *sacrrrées Anglais* always had well-filled purses.

"Oh, lud!" said Marguerite, as she advanced into the room, holding her handkerchief to her dainty nose, "what a dreadful hole! Are you sure this is the place?"

"Aye! 'tis the place, sure enough," replied the young man as, with his lace-edged, fashionable handkerchief, he dusted a chair for Marguerite to sit on; "but I vow I never saw a more villainous hole."

"Faith!" she said, looking round with some curiosity and a great deal of horror at the dilapidated walls, the broken chairs, the rickety table, "it certainly does not look inviting."

The landlord of the *Chat Gris*—by name, Brogard—had taken no further notice of his guests; he concluded that presently they would order supper, and in the meanwhile it was not for a free citizen to show deference, or even courtesy, to anyone, however smartly they might be dressed.

By the hearth sat a huddled-up figure, clad, seemingly, mostly in rags: that figure was apparently a woman, although even that would have been hard to distinguish, except for the cap, which had once been white, and for what looked like the semblance of a petticoat. She was sitting mumbling to herself, and from time to time stirring the brew in her stock-pot.

"Hey, my friend!" said Sir Andrew at last, "we should like some supper. . . . The citoyenne there," he added, pointing to the huddled-up bundle of rags by the hearth, "is concocting some delicious soup, I'll warrant, and my mistress has not tasted food for several hours."

It took Brogard some few moments to consider the question. A free citizen does not respond too readily to the wishes of those who happen to require something of him!

"Sacrrrés aristos!" he murmured, and once more spat upon the ground.

Then he went very slowly up to a dresser which stood in a corner of the room; from this he took an old pewter soup-tureen and slowly, and without a word, he handed it to his better-half, who, in the same silence, began filling the tureen with the soup out of her stock-pot.

Marguerite had watched all these preparations with absolute horror; were it not for the earnestness of her purpose, she would incontinently have fled from this abode of dirt and evil smells.

"Faith! our host and hostess are not cheerful people," said Sir Andrew, seeing the look of horror on Marguerite's face. "I would I could offer you a more hearty and more appetizing meal . . . but I think you will find the soup eatable and the wine good; these people wallow in dirt but live well as a rule."

"Nay; I pray you, Sir Andrew," she said gently "be not anxious about me. My mind is scarce inclined to dwell on thoughts of supper."

Brogard was slowly pursuing his gruesome preparations; he had placed a couple of spoons, also two glasses on the table, both of which Sir Andrew took the precaution of wiping carefully.

Brogard had also produced a bottle of wine and some bread, and Marguerite made an effort to draw her chair to the table and to make some pretence at eating. Sir Andrew, as befitting his rôle of lacquey, stood behind her chair.

"Nay, Madame, I pray you," he said, seeing that Marguerite seemed quite unable to eat, "I beg of you to try and swallow some food—remember you have need of all your strength."

The soup certainly was not bad; it smelt and tasted good. Marguerite might have enjoyed it, but for the horrible surroundings. She broke the bread, however, and drank some of the wine.

"Nay, Sir Andrew," she said, "I do not like to see you standing. You have need of food just as much as I have. This creature will only think that I am an eccentric Englishwoman eloping with her lacquey, if you'll sit down and partake of this semblance of supper beside me."

Indeed, Brogard having placed what was strictly necessary upon the table, seemed not to trouble himself any further about his guests. The Mère Brogard had quietly shuffled out of the room, and the man stood and lounged about, smoking his evil-smelling pipe, sometimes under Marguerite's very nose, as any free-born citizen, who was anybody's equal should do.

"Confound the brute!" said Sir Andrew, with native British wrath, as Brogard leant up against the table, smoking and looking down superciliously at these two *sacrrrés Anglais.*

"In Heaven's name, man," admonished Marguerite, hurriedly, seeing that Sir Andrew, with British-born instinct, was ominously clenching his fist, "remember that you are in France, and that in this year of grace this is the temper of the people."

"I'd like to scrag the brute!" muttered Sir Andrew, savagely.

He had taken Marguerite's advice and sat next to her at table, and they were both making noble efforts to deceive one another, by pretending to eat and drink.

"I pray you," said Marguerite, "keep the creature in a good temper, so that he may answer the questions we must put to him."

"I'll do my best, but, begad! I'd sooner scrag him than question him. Hey! my friend," he said pleasantly in French, and tapping Brogard lightly on the shoulder, "do you see many of our quality along these parts? Many English travellers, I mean?"

Brogard looked round at him, over his near shoulder, puffed away at his pipe for a moment or two as he was in no hurry, then muttered—

"Heu?—sometimes!"

"Ah!" said Sir Andrew, carelessly. "English travellers always know where they can get good wine, eh! my friend?—Now, tell me, my lady was desiring to know if by any chance you happen to have seen a great friend of hers, an English gentleman, who often comes to Calais on business; he is tall, and recently was on his way to Paris—my lady hoped to have met him in Calais."

Marguerite tried not to look at Brogard, lest she should betray before him the burning anxiety with which she waited for his reply. But a free-born French citizen is never in any hurry to answer questions: Brogard took his time, then he said very slowly—

"Tall Englishman?—To-day!—Yes."

"You have seen him?" asked Sir Andrew, carelessly.

"Yes, to-day," muttered Brogard, sullenly. Then he quietly took Sir Andrew's hat from a chair close by, put it on his own head, tugged at his dirty blouse, and generally tried to express in pantomime that the individual in question wore very fine clothes. "Sacrrré aristo!" he muttered, "that tall Englishman!"

Marguerite could scarce repress a scream.

"It's Sir Percy right enough," she murmured, "and not even in disguise!"

She smiled, in the midst of all her anxiety, and through her gathering tears, at thought of "the ruling passion strong in death"; of Percy running into the wildest, maddest dangers, with the latest-cut coat upon his back, and the laces of his jabot unruffled.

"Oh! the foolhardiness of it!" she sighed. "Quick, Sir Andrew! ask the man when he went."

"Ah, yes, my friend," said Sir Andrew, addressing Brogard, with the same assumption of carelessness, "my lord always wears beautiful clothes; the tall Englishman you saw was certainly my lady's friend. And he has gone, you say?"

"He went . . . yes . . . but he's coming back . . . here—he ordered supper . . ."

Sir Andrew put his hand with a quick gesture of warning upon Marguerite's arm; it came none too soon, for the next moment her wild, mad joy would have betrayed her. He was safe and well, was coming back here presently, she would see him in a few moments perhaps. . . . Oh! the wildness of her joy seemed almost more than she could bear.

"Here!" she said to Brogard, who seemed suddenly to have been transformed in her eyes into some heaven-born messenger of bliss. "Here!—did you say the English gentleman was coming back here?"

The heaven-born messenger of bliss spat upon the floor to express his contempt for all and sundry aristos who chose to haunt the *Chat Gris*.

"Heu!" he muttered, "he ordered supper—he will come back. . . . Sacrrré Anglais!" he added, by way of protest against all this fuss for a mere Englishman.

"But where is he now?—Do you know?" she asked eagerly, placing her dainty white hand upon the dirty sleeve of his blue blouse.

"He went to get a horse and cart," said Brogard, laconically, as, with a surly gesture, he shook off from his arm that pretty hand which princes had been proud to kiss.

"At what time did he go?"

But Brogard had evidently had enough of these questionings. He did not think that it was fitting for a citizen—who was the equal of anybody—to be thus catechized by these *sacrrrés aristos*, even though they were rich English ones. It was distinctly more fitting to his newborn dignity to be as rude as possible; it was a sure sign of servility to meekly reply to civil questions.

"I don't know," he said, surlily. "I have said enough, voyons, les aristos! . . . He came to-day. He ordered supper. He went out.—He'll come back. Voilà!"

And with this parting assertion of his rights as a citizen and a free man, to be as rude as he well pleased, Brogard shuffled out of the room, banging the door after him.

23

HOPE

"Faith, Madame!" said Sir Andrew, seeing that Marguerite seemed desirous to call her surly host back again, "I think we'd better leave him alone. We shall not get anything more out of him, and we might arouse his suspicions. One never knows what spies may be lurking around these God-forsaken places."

"What care I!" she replied lightly, "now I know that my husband is safe, and that I shall see him almost directly!"

"Hush!" he said in genuine alarm, for she had talked quite loudly, in the fullness of her glee, "the very walls have ears in France, these days."

He rose quickly from the table, and walked round the bare, squalid room, listening attentively at the door, through which Brogard had just disappeared, and whence only muttered oaths and shuffling footsteps could be heard. He also ran up the rickety steps that led to the attic, to assure himself that there were no spies of Chauvelin's about the place.

"Are we alone, Monsieur, my lacquey?" said Marguerite, gaily, as the young man once more sat down beside her. "May we talk?"

"As cautiously as possible!" he entreated.

"Faith, man! but you wear a glum face! As for me I could dance with joy! Surely there is no longer any cause for fear. Our boat is on the beach, the *Foam Crest* not two miles out to sea, and my husband will be here, under this very roof, within the next half-hour perhaps. Sure! there is naught to hinder us. Chauvelin and his gang have not yet arrived."

"Nay, madam! that I fear we do not know."

"What do you mean?"

"He was at Dover at the same time that we were."

"Held up by the same storm which kept us from starting."

"Exactly. But—I did not speak of it before, for I feared to alarm you—I saw him on the beach not five minutes before we embarked. At least, I swore to myself at the time that it was himself; he was disguised as a curé, so that Satan, his own guardian, would scarce have known him. But I heard him then, bargaining for a vessel to take him swiftly to Calais; and he must have set sail less than an hour after we did."

Marguerite's face had quickly lost its look of joy. The terrible danger in which Percy stood, now that he was actually on French soil, became suddenly and horribly clear to her. Chauvelin was close upon his heels; here in Calais, the astute diplomatist was all powerful; a word from him and Percy could be tracked and arrested and . . .

Every drop of blood seemed to freeze in her veins; not even during the moments of her wildest anguish in England had she so completely realized the imminence of the peril in which her husband stood. Chauvelin had sworn to bring the Scarlet Pimpernel to the guillotine, and now the daring plotter, whose anonymity hitherto had been his safeguard, stood revealed, through her own hand, to his most bitter, most relentless enemy.

Chauvelin—when he waylaid Lord Tony and Sir Andrew Ffoulkes in the coffee-room of *The Fisherman's Rest*—had obtained possession of all the plans of this latest expedition. Armand St. Just, the Comte de Tournay and other fugitive royalists were to have met the Scarlet Pimpernel—or rather, as it had been originally arranged, two of his emissaries—on this day, the 2nd of October, at a place evidently known to the league, and vaguely alluded to as the "Père Blanchard's hut."

Armand, whose connexion with the Scarlet Pimpernel and disavowal of the brutal policy of the Reign of Terror was still unknown to his countrymen, had left England a little more than a week ago, carrying with him the necessary instructions, which would enable him to meet the other fugitives and to convey them to this place of safety.

This much Marguerite had fully understood from the first, and Sir Andrew Ffoulkes had confirmed her surmises. She knew, too, that when Sir Percy realized that his own plans and his directions to his lieutenants had been stolen by Chauvelin, it was too late to communicate with Armand or to send fresh instructions to the fugitives.

They would, of necessity, be at the appointed time and place, not knowing how grave was the danger which now awaited their brave rescuer.

Blakeney, who as usual had planned and organized the whole expedition, would not allow any of his younger comrades to run the risk of almost certain capture. Hence his hurried note to them at Lord Grenville's ball—"Start myself to-morrow—alone."

And now with his identity known to his most bitter enemy his every step would be dogged the moment he set foot in France. He would be tracked by Chauvelin's emissaries, followed until he reached that mysterious hut where the fugitives were waiting for him, and there the trap would be closed on him and on them.

There was but one hour—the hour's start which Marguerite and Sir Andrew had of their enemy—in which to warn Percy of the imminence of his danger, and to persuade him to give up the foolhardy expedition, which could only end in his own death.

But there *was* that one hour.

"Chauvelin knows of this inn, from the papers he stole," said Sir Andrew earnestly, "and on landing will make straight for it."

"He has not landed yet," she said, "we have an hour's start of him, and Percy will be here directly. We shall be mid-Channel ere Chauvelin has realized that we have slipped through his fingers."

She spoke excitedly and eagerly, wishing to infuse into her young friend some of that buoyant hope which still clung to her heart. But he shook his head sadly.

"Silent again, Sir Andrew?" she said with some impatience. "Why do you shake your head and look so glum?"

"Faith, Madame," he replied, "'tis only because in making your rose-coloured plans, you are forgetting the most important factor."

"What in the world do you mean?—I am forgetting nothing. . . . What factor do you mean?" she added with more impatience.

"It stands six foot odd high," replied Sir Andrew quietly, "and hath name Percy Blakeney."

"I don't understand," she murmured.

"Do you think that Blakeney would leave Calais without having accomplished what he set out to do?"

"You mean . . .?"

"There's the old Comte de Tournay . . ."

"The Comte . . .?" she murmured.

"And St. Just . . . and others . . ."

"My brother!" she said, with a heartbroken sob of anguish. "Heaven help me, but I fear I had forgotten."

"Fugitives as they are, these men at this moment await with perfect confidence and unshaken faith the arrival of the Scarlet Pimpernel, who has pledged his honour to take them safely across the Channel."

Indeed, she had forgotten! With the sublime selfishness of a woman who loves with her whole heart, she had in the last twenty-four hours had no thought save for him. His precious, noble life, his danger—he, the loved one, the brave hero, he alone dwelt in her mind.

"My brother!" she murmured, as one by one the heavy tears gathered in her eyes, as memory came to her of Armand, the companion and darling of her childhood, the man for whom she had committed the deadly sin which had so hopelessly imperilled her brave husband's life.

"Sir Percy Blakeney would not be the trusted, honoured leader of a score of English gentlemen," said Sir Andrew proudly, "if he abandoned those who placed their trust in him. As for breaking his word, the very thought is preposterous!"

There was silence for a moment or two. Marguerite had buried her face in her hands, and was letting the tears slowly trickle, through her trembling fingers. The young man said nothing; his heart ached for this beautiful woman in her awful grief. All along he had felt the terrible *impasse* in which her own rash act had plunged them all. He knew his friend and leader so well, with his reckless daring, his mad bravery, his worship of his own word of honour. Sir Andrew knew that Blakeney would brave any danger, run the wildest risks, sooner than break it, and, with Chauvelin at his very heels, would make a final attempt, however desperate, to rescue those who trusted in him.

"Faith, Sir Andrew," said Marguerite at last, making brave efforts to dry her tears, "you are right, and I would not now shame myself by trying to dissuade him from doing his duty. As you say, I should plead in vain. God grant him strength and ability," she added fervently and resolutely, "to outwit his pursuers. He will not refuse to take you with him, perhaps, when he starts on his noble work; between you, you will have cunning as well as valour! God guard you both! In the meanwhile I think we should lose no time. I still believe that his safety depends upon his knowing that Chauvelin is on his track."

"Undoubtedly. He has wonderful resources at his command. As soon as he is aware of his danger he will exercise more caution; his ingenuity is a veritable miracle."

"Then, what say you to a voyage of reconnaissance in the village whilst I wait here against his coming! —You might come across Percy's track and thus save valuable time. If you find him, tell him to beware!—his bitterest enemy is on his heels!"

"But this is such a villainous hole for you to wait in."

"Nay, that I do not mind!—But you might ask our surly host if he could let me wait in another room, where I could be safer from the prying eyes of any chance traveller. Offer him some ready money, so that he should not fail to give me word the moment the tall Englishman returns."

She spoke quite calmly, even cheerfully now, thinking out her plans, ready for the worst if need be; she would show no more weakness, she would prove herself worthy of him, who was about to give his life for the sake of his fellow-men.

Sir Andrew obeyed her without further comment. Instinctively he felt that hers now was the stronger mind; he was willing to give himself over to her guidance, to become the hand, whilst she was the directing head.

He went to the door of the inner room, through which Brogard and his wife had disappeared before, and knocked; as usual, he was answered by a salvo of muttered oaths.

"Hey! friend Brogard!" said the young man peremptorily, "my lady would wish to rest here awhile. Could you give her the use of another room? She would wish to be alone."

He took some money out of his pocket, and allowed it to jingle significantly in his hand. Brogard had opened the door, and listened, with his usual surly apathy, to the young man's request. At sight of the gold, however, his lazy attitude relaxed slightly, he took his pipe from his mouth and shuffled into the room.

He then pointed over his shoulder at the attic up in the wall.

"She can wait up there!" he said with a grunt "It's comfortable, and I have no other room."

"Nothing could be better," said Marguerite in English; she at once realized the advantages such a position hidden from view would give her. "Give him the money, Sir Andrew; I shall be quite happy up there, and can see everything without being seen."

She nodded to Brogard, who condescended to go up to the attic, and to shake up the straw that lay on the floor.

"May I entreat you, madam, to do nothing rash," said Sir Andrew, as Marguerite prepared in her turn to ascend the rickety flight of steps. "Remember this place is infested with spies. Do not, I beg of you, reveal yourself to Sir Percy, unless you are absolutely certain that you are alone with him."

Even as he spoke, he felt how unnecessary was this caution: Marguerite was as calm, as clear-headed, as any man. There was no fear of her doing anything that was rash.

"Nay," she said, with a slight attempt at cheerfulness, "that can I faithfully promise you. I would not jeopardize my husband's life, nor yet his plans, by speaking to him before strangers. Have no fear, I will watch my opportunity, and serve him in the manner I think he needs most."

Brogard had come down the steps again, and Marguerite was ready to go up to her safe retreat.

"I dare not kiss your hand, madam," said Sir Andrew, as she began to mount the steps, "since I am your lacquey, but I pray you be of good cheer. If I do not come across Blakeney in half an hour, I shall return, expecting to find him here."

"Yes, that will be best. We can afford to wait for half an hour. Chauvelin cannot possibly be here before that. God grant that either you or I may have seen Percy by then. Good luck to you, friend! Have no fear for me."

Lightly she mounted the rickety wooden steps that led to the attic. Brogard was taking no further heed of her. She could make herself comfortable there or not, as she chose. Sir Andrew watched her until she had reached the loft and sat down upon the straw.

She pulled the tattered curtains across, and the young man noted that she was singularly well placed there for seeing and hearing, whilst remaining unobserved.

He had paid Brogard well; the surly old innkeeper would have no object in betraying her. Then Sir Andrew prepared to go. At the door he turned once again, and looked up at the loft. Through the ragged curtains Marguerite's sweet face was peeping down at him, and the young man rejoiced to see that it looked serene, and even gently smiling. With a final nod of farewell to her, he walked out into the night.

24

THE DEATH-TRAP

The next quarter of an hour went by swiftly and noiselessly. In the room downstairs, Brogard had for a while busied himself with clearing the table, and rearranging it for another guest.

It was because she watched these preparations, that Marguerite found the time slipping by more pleasantly. It was for Percy that this semblance of supper was being got ready. Evidently Brogard had a certain amount of respect for the tall Englishman, as he seemed to take some trouble in making the place look a trifle less uninviting than it had done before.

He even produced from some hidden recess in the old dresser, what actually looked like a table-cloth; and when he spread it out, and saw it was full of holes, he shook his head dubiously for a while, then was at much pains so to spread it over the table, as to hide most of its blemishes.

Then he got out a serviette, also old and ragged, but possessing some measure of cleanliness, and with this he carefully wiped the glasses, spoons and plates which he put on the table.

Marguerite could not help smiling to herself as she watched all these preparations, which Brogard accomplished to an accompaniment of muttered oaths. Clearly the great height and bulk of the Englishman, or perhaps the weight of his fist, had overawed this free-born citizen of France, or he would never have been at such trouble for any *sacrré aristo.*

When the table was set—such as it was—Brogard surveyed it with evident satisfaction. He then dusted one of the chairs with the corner of his blouse, gave a stir to the stock-pot, threw a fresh bundle of faggots on to the fire, and slouched out of the room.

Marguerite was left alone with her reflections. She had spread her travelling-cloak over the straw, and was sitting fairly comfortably, as the straw was fresh and the evil odours from below came up to her only in a modified form.

But, momentarily, she was almost happy; happy because, when she peeped through the tattered curtains, she could see a rickety chair, a torn table-cloth, a glass, a plate and a spoon; that was all. But those mute and ugly things seemed to say to her, that they were waiting for Percy; that soon, very soon, he would be here, that the squalid room being still empty, they would be alone together.

That thought was so heavenly, that Marguerite closed her eyes in order to shut out everything but that. In a few minutes she would be alone with him; she would run down the ladder, and let him see her; then he would take her in his arms, and she would let him see that, after that, she would gladly die for him, and with him, for earth could hold no greater happiness than that.

And then what would happen? She could not even remotely conjecture. She knew, of course, that Sir Andrew was right, that Percy would do everything he had set out to accomplish; that she—now she was here—could do nothing beyond warning him to be cautious, since Chauvelin himself was on his track. After having cautioned him, she would perforce have to see him go off upon his terrible and daring mission; she could not, even with a word or look, attempt to keep him back. She would have to obey, whatever he told her to do, even perhaps have to efface herself, and wait, in indescribable agony, whilst he, perhaps, went to his death.

But even that seemed less terrible to bear than the thought that he should never know how much she loved him—that at any rate would be spared her; the squalid room itself, which seemed to be waiting for him, told her that he would be here soon.

Suddenly her over-sensitive ears caught the sound of distant footsteps drawing near; her heart gave a wild leap of joy! Was it Percy at last? No; the step did not seem quite as long, nor quite as firm as his; she also thought that she could hear two distinct sets of footsteps. Yes! that was it! two men were coming this way. Two strangers perhaps, to get a drink, or . . .

But she had not time to conjecture, for presently there was a peremptory call at the door, and the next moment it was violently thrown open from the outside, whilst a rough, commanding voice shouted—

"Hey! Citoyen Brogard! Holá!"

Marguerite could not see the new-comers, but, through a hole in one of the curtains, she could observe one portion of the room below.

She heard Brogard's shuffling footsteps, as he came out of the inner room, muttering his usual string of oaths. On seeing the strangers, however, he paused in the middle of the room, well within range of Marguerite's vision, looked at them with even more withering contempt than he had bestowed upon his former guests, and muttered, "Sacrrée soutane!"

Marguerite's heart seemed all at once to stop beating; her eyes, large and dilated, had fastened on one of the new-comers, who, at this point, had taken a quick step forward towards Brogard. He was dressed in the soutane, broad-brimmed hat and buckled shoes, habitual to the French *curé*, but as he stood opposite the innkeeper, he threw open his soutane for a moment, displaying the tricolour scarf of officialism, which sight immediately had the effect of transforming Brogard's attitude of contempt into one of cringing obsequiousness.

It was the sight of this French *curé* which seemed to freeze the very blood in Marguerite's veins. She could not see his face, which was shaded by his broad-brimmed hat, but she recognized the thin, bony hands, the slight stoop, the whole gait of the man! It was Chauvelin!

The horror of the situation struck her as with a physical blow; the awful disappointment, the dread of what was to come, made her very senses reel, and she needed almost superhuman effort not to fall senseless beneath it all.

"A plate of soup and a bottle of wine," said Chauvelin imperiously to Brogard, "then clear out of here—understand? I want to be alone."

Silently, and without any muttering this time, Brogard obeyed. Chauvelin sat down at the table which had been prepared for the tall Englishman, and the innkeeper busied himself obsequiously round him, dishing up the soup and pouring out the wine. The man who had entered with Chauvelin and whom Marguerite could not see, stood waiting close by the door.

At a brusque sign from Chauvelin, Brogard had hurried back to the inner room, and the former now beckoned to the man who had accompanied him.

In him Marguerite at once recognized Desgas, Chauvelin's secretary and confidential factotum, whom she had often seen in Paris, in the days gone by. He crossed the room, and for a moment or two listened attentively at the Brogards' door.

"Not listening?" asked Chauvelin curtly.

"No, citoyen."

For a second Marguerite dreaded lest Chauvelin should order Desgas to search the place; what would happen if she were to be discovered, she hardly dared to imagine. Fortunately, however, Chauvelin seemed more impatient to talk to his secretary than afraid of spies, for he called Desgas quickly back to his side.

"The English schooner?" he asked.

"She was lost sight of at sundown, citoyen," replied Desgas, "but was then making west, towards Cap Gris Nez."

"Ah!—good!—" muttered Chauvelin, "and now, about Captain Jutley!—what did he say?"

"He assured me that all the orders you sent him last week have been implicitly obeyed. All the roads which converge to this place have been patrolled night and day ever since: and the beach and cliffs have been most rigorously searched and guarded."

"Does he know where this 'Père Blanchard's hut' is?"

"No, citoyen, nobody seems to know of it by that name. There are any amount of fishermen's huts all along the coast, of course . . . but . . ."

"That'll do. Now about to-night?" interrupted Chauvelin impatiently.

"The roads and the beach are patrolled as usual, citoyen, and Captain Jutley awaits further orders."

"Go back to him at once then. Tell him to send reinforcements to the various patrols; and especially to those along the beach—you understand?"

Chauvelin spoke curtly and to the point, and every word he uttered struck at Marguerite's heart like the death-knell of her fondest hopes.

"The men," he continued, "are to keep the sharpest possible look-out for any stranger who may be walking, riding, or driving along the road or the beach, more especially for a tall stranger, whom I need not describe further, as probably he will be disguised; but he cannot very well conceal his height, except by stooping. You understand?"

"Perfectly, citoyen," replied Desgas.

"As soon as any of the men have sighted a stranger, two of them are to keep him in view. The man who loses sight of the tall stranger, after he is once seen, will pay for his negligence with his life; but one man is to ride straight back here and report to me. Is that clear?"

"Absolutely clear, citoyen."

"Very well, then. Go and see Jutley at once. See the reinforcements start off for the patrol duty, then ask the captain to let you have half a dozen more men and bring them here with you. You can be back in ten minutes. Go——"

Desgas saluted and went to the door.

As Marguerite, sick with horror, listened to Chauvelin's directions to his underling, the whole of the plan for the capture of the Scarlet Pimpernel became appallingly clear to her. Chauvelin wished that the fugitives should be left in false security, waiting in their hidden retreat until Percy joined them. Then the daring plotter was to be surrounded and caught red-handed, in the very act of aiding and abetting royalists, who were traitors to the republic. Thus, if his capture were noised abroad, even the British Government could not legally protest in his favour; having plotted with the enemies of the French Government, France had the right to put him to death.

Escape for him and them would be impossible. All the roads patrolled and watched, the trap well set, the net, wide at present, but drawing together tighter and tighter, until it closed upon the daring plotter, whose superhuman cunning even could not rescue him from its meshes now.

Desgas was about to go, but Chauvelin once more called him back. Marguerite vaguely wondered what further devilish plans he could have formed, in order to entrap one brave man, alone, against two-score of others. She looked at him as he turned to speak to Desgas; she could just see his face beneath the broad-brimmed *curé's* hat. There was at that moment so much deadly hatred, such fiendish malice in the thin face and pale, small eyes, that Marguerite's last hope died in her heart, for she felt that from this man she could expect no mercy.

"I had forgotten," repeated Chauvelin, with a weird chuckle, as he rubbed his bony, talon-like hands one against the other with a gesture of fiendish satisfaction. "The tall stranger may show fight. In any case no shooting, remember, except as a last resort. I want that tall stranger alive . . . if possible."

He laughed, as Dante has told us that the devils laugh at sight of the torture of the damned. Marguerite had thought that by now she had lived through the whole gamut of horror and anguish that human heart could bear; yet now, when Desgas left the house, and she remained alone in this lonely, squalid room, with that fiend for company, she felt as if all that she had suffered was nothing compared with this. He continued to laugh and chuckle to himself for a while, rubbing his hands together in anticipation of his triumph.

His plans were well laid, and he might well triumph! not a loophole was left, through which the bravest, the most cunning man might escape. Every road guarded, every corner watched, and in that lonely hut somewhere on the coast, a small band of fugitives waiting for their rescuer, and leading him to his death—nay! to worse than death. That fiend there, in a holy man's garb, was too much of a devil to allow a brave man to die the quick, sudden death of a soldier at the post of duty.

He, above all, longed to have the cunning enemy, who had so long baffled him, helpless in his power; he wished to gloat over him, to enjoy his downfall, to inflict upon him what moral and mental torture a deadly hatred alone can devise. The brave eagle, captured, and with noble wings clipped, was doomed to endure the gnawing of the rat. And she, his wife, who loved him, and who had brought him to this, could do nothing to help him.

Nothing, save to hope for death by his side, and for one brief moment in which to tell him that her love—whole, true and passionate—was entirely his.

Chauvelin was now sitting close to the table; he had taken off his hat, and Marguerite could just see the outline of his thin profile and pointed chin, as he bent over his meagre supper. He was evidently quite contented, and awaited events with perfect calm; he even seemed to enjoy Brogard's unsavoury fare. Marguerite wondered how so much hatred could lurk in one human being against another.

Suddenly, as she watched Chauvelin, a sound caught her ear, which turned her very heart to stone. And yet that sound was not calculated to inspire anyone with horror, for it was merely the cheerful sound of a gay, fresh voice singing lustily, "God save the King!"

25

THE EAGLE AND THE FOX

Marguerite's breath stopped short; she seemed to feel her very life standing still momentarily whilst she listened to that voice and to that song. In the singer she had recognized her husband. Chauvelin, too, had heard it, for he darted a quick glance towards the door, then hurriedly took up his broad-brimmed hat and clapped it over his head.

The voice drew nearer; for one brief second the wild desire seized Marguerite to rush down the steps and fly across the room, to stop that song at any cost, to beg the cheerful singer to fly—fly for his life, before it be too late. She checked the impulse just in time. Chauvelin would stop her before she reached the door, and, moreover, she had no idea if he had any soldiers posted within his call. Her impetuous act might prove the death-signal of the man she would have died to save.

Long to reign over us,
God save the King

sang the voice more lustily than ever. The next moment the door was thrown open and there was dead silence for a second or so.

Marguerite could not see the door; she held her breath, trying to imagine what was happening.

Percy Blakeney on entering had, of course, at once caught sight of the *curé* at the table; his hesitation lasted less than five seconds, the next moment Marguerite saw his tall figure crossing the room, whilst he called in a loud cheerful voice—

"Hello, there! no one about? Where's that fool Brogard?"

He wore the magnificent coat and riding-suit which he had on when Marguerite last saw him at Richmond, so many hours ago. As usual, his get-up was absolutely irreproachable, the fine Mechlin lace at his neck and wrists was immaculate in its gossamer daintiness, his hands looked slender and white, his fair hair was carefully brushed and he carried his eyeglass with his usual affected gesture. In fact, at this moment, Sir Percy Blakeney, Bart., might have been on his way to a garden-party at the Prince of Wales', instead of deliberately, cold-bloodedly running his head in a trap set for him by his deadliest enemy.

He stood for a moment in the middle of the room, whilst Marguerite, absolutely paralysed with horror, seemed unable even to breathe.

Every moment she expected that Chauvelin would give a signal, that the place would fill with soldiers, that she would rush down and help Percy to sell his life dearly. As he stood there, suavely unconscious, she very nearly screamed out to him—

"Fly, Percy—'tis your deadly enemy!—fly before it be too late!"

But she had not time even to do that, for the next moment Blakeney quietly walked to the table, and, jovially clapping the *curé* on the back, said in his own drawly, affected way—

"Odd's fish! . . . er . . . M. Chauvelin. . . . I vow I never thought of meeting you here."

Chauvelin, who had been in the very act of conveying soup to his mouth, fairly choked. His thin face became absolutely purple, and a violent fit of coughing saved this cunning representative of France from betraying the most boundless surprise he had ever experienced. There was no doubt that this bold move on the part of the enemy had been wholly unexpected, as far as he was concerned; and the daring impudence of it completely nonplussed him for the moment.

Obviously he had not taken the precaution of having the inn surrounded with soldiers. Blakeney had evidently guessed that much, and no doubt his resourceful brain had already formed some plan by which he could turn this unexpected interview to account.

Marguerite up in the loft had not moved. She had made a solemn promise to Sir Andrew not to speak to her husband before strangers, and she had sufficient self-control not to throw herself unreasoningly and impulsively across his plans. To sit still and watch these two men together was a terrible trial of fortitude. Marguerite had heard Chauvelin give the orders for the patrolling of all the roads. She knew that if Percy now left the *Chat Gris*—in whichever direction he happened to go—he could not go far without being sighted by some of Captain Jutley's men on patrol. On the other hand, if he stayed, then Desgas would have time to come back with the half-dozen men Chauvelin had specially ordered.

The trap was closing in, and Marguerite could do nothing but watch and wonder. The two men looked such a strange contrast, and of the two it was Chauvelin who exhibited a slight touch of fear. Marguerite knew him well enough to guess what was passing in his mind. He had no fear for his own person, although he certainly was alone in a lonely inn with a man who was powerfully built, and who was daring and reckless beyond the bounds of probability. She knew that Chauvelin would willingly have braved perilous encounters for the sake of the cause he had at heart, but what he did fear was that this impudent Englishman would, by knocking him down, double his own chances of escape; his underlings might not succeed so well in capturing the Scarlet Pimpernel when not directed by the cunning hand and the shrewd brain, which had deadly hate for an incentive.

Evidently, however, the representative of the French Government had nothing to fear for the moment, at the hands of his powerful adversary. Blakeney, with his most inane laugh and pleasant good-nature, was solemnly patting him on the back.

"I am so demmed sorry . . ." he was saying cheerfully, "so very sorry . . . I seem to have upset you . . . eating soup, too . . . nasty, awkward thing, soup . . . er . . . Begad!—a friend of mine died once . . . er . . . choked . . . just like you . . . with a spoonful of soup."

And he smiled shyly, good-humouredly, down at Chauvelin.

"Odd's life!" he continued, as soon as the latter had somewhat recovered himself, "beastly hole this . . . ain't it now? La! you don't mind?" he added, apologetically, as he sat down on a chair close to the table and drew the soup tureen towards him. "That fool Brogard seems to be asleep or something."

There was a second plate on the table, and he calmly helped himself to soup, then poured himself out a glass of wine.

For a moment Marguerite wondered what Chauvelin would do. His disguise was so good that perhaps he meant, on recovering himself, to deny his identity: but Chauvelin was too astute to make such an obviously false and childish move, and already he too had stretched out his hand and said pleasantly—

"I am indeed charmed to see you, Sir Percy. You must excuse me—h'm—I thought you the other side of the Channel. Sudden surprise almost took my breath away."

"La!" said Sir Percy, with a good-humoured grin, "it did that quite, didn't it—er—M.—er—Chaubertin?"

"Pardon me—Chauvelin."

"I beg pardon—a thousand times. Yes—Chauvelin of course. . . . Er . . . I never could cotton to foreign names. . . ."

He was calmly eating his soup, laughing with pleasant good-humour, as if he had come all the way to Calais for the express purpose of enjoying supper at this filthy inn, in the company of his arch-enemy.

For the moment Marguerite wondered why Percy did not knock the little Frenchman down then and there—and no doubt something of the sort must have darted through his mind, for every now and then his lazy eyes seemed to flash ominously, as they rested on the slight figure of Chauvelin, who had now quite recovered himself and was also calmly eating his soup.

But the keen brain, which had planned and carried through so many daring plots, was too far-seeing to take unnecessary risks. This place, after all, might be infested with spies; the innkeeper might be in Chauvelin's pay. One call on Chauvelin's part might bring twenty men about Blakeney's ears for aught he knew, and he might be caught and trapped before he could help or, at least, warn the fugitives. This he would not risk; he meant to help the others, to get *them* safely away; for he had pledged his word to them, and his word he *would* keep. And whilst he ate and chatted, he thought and planned, whilst, up in the loft, the poor, anxious woman racked her brains as to what she should do, and endured agonies of longing to rush down to him, yet daring not to move for fear of upsetting his plans.

"I didn't know," Blakeney was saying jovially, "that you . . . er . . . were in holy orders."

"I . . . er . . . hem . . ." stammered Chauvelin. The calm impudence of his antagonist had evidently thrown him off his usual balance.

"But, la! I should have known you anywhere," continued Sir Percy, placidly, as he poured himself out another glass of wine, "although the wig and hat have changed you a bit."

"Do you think so?"

"Lud! they alter a man so . . . but . . . begad! I hope you don't mind my having made the remark? . . . Demmed bad form making remarks. . . . I hope you don't mind?"

"No, no, not at all—hem! I hope Lady Blakeney is well," said Chauvelin, hurriedly changing the topic of conversation.

Blakeney, with much deliberation, finished his plate of soup, drank his glass of wine, and, momentarily, it seemed to Marguerite as if he glanced quickly all round the room.

"Quite well, thank you," he said, at last, drily. There was a pause, during which Marguerite could watch these two antagonists who, evidently, in their minds were measuring themselves against one another. She could see Percy almost full face where he sat at the table not ten yards from where she herself was crouching, puzzled, not knowing what to do, or what she should think. She had quite controlled her impulse by now of rushing down and disclosing herself to her husband. A man capable of acting a part, in the way he was doing at the present moment, did not need a woman's word to warn him to be cautious.

Marguerite indulged in the luxury dear to every woman's tender heart, of looking at the man she loved. She looked through the tattered curtain, across at the handsome face of her husband, in whose lazy blue eyes, and behind whose inane smile, she could now so plainly see the strength, energy, and resourcefulness which had caused the Scarlet Pimpernel to be reverenced and trusted by his followers. "There are nineteen of us ready to lay down our lives for your husband, Lady Blakeney," Sir Andrew had said to her; and as she looked at the forehead, low, but square and broad, the eyes, blue, yet deep-set and intense, the whole aspect of the man, of indomitable energy, hiding, behind a perfectly acted comedy, his almost superhuman strength of will and marvellous ingenuity, she understood the fascination which he exercised over his followers, for had he not also cast his spells over her heart and her imagination?

Chauvelin, who was trying to conceal his impatience beneath his usual urbane manner, took a quick look at his watch. Desgas should not be long: another two or three minutes, and this impudent Englishman would be secure in the keeping of half a dozen of Captain Jutley's most trusted men.

"You are on your way to Paris, Sir Percy?" he asked carelessly.

"Odd's life, no," replied Blakeney, with a laugh. "Only as far as Lille—not Paris for me . . . beastly uncomfortable place Paris, just for me . . . eh, Monsieur Chaubertin . . . beg pardon . . . Chauvelin!"

"Not for an English gentleman like yourself, Sir Percy," rejoined Chauvelin, sarcastically, "who takes no interest in the conflict that is raging there."

"La! you see it's no business of mine, and our demmed government is all on your side of the business. Old Pitt daren't say 'Bo' to a goose. You are in a hurry, sir," he added, as Chauvelin once again took out his watch; "an appointment, perhaps. . . . I pray you take no heed of me. . . . My time's my own."

He rose from the table and dragged a chair to the hearth. Once more Marguerite was terribly tempted to go to him, for time was getting on; Desgas might be back at any moment with his men. Percy did not know that and . . . oh! how horrible it all was—and how helpless she felt!

"I am in no hurry," continued Percy, pleasantly, "but, la! I don't want to spend any more time than I can help in this God-forsaken hole! But, begad, sir," he added, as Chauvelin had surreptitiously looked at his watch for the third time, "that watch of yours won't go any faster for all the looking you give it. You are expecting a friend, maybe?"

"Aye—a friend!"

"Not a lady—I trust Monsieur l'Abbé," laughed Blakeney; "surely the holy Church does not allow? . . . eh? . . . what! But, I say, come by the fire . . . it's getting demmed cold."

He kicked the fire with the heel of his boot, making the logs blaze in the old hearth. He seemed in no hurry to go, and apparently was quite unconscious of his immediate danger. He dragged another chair to the fire, and Chauvelin, whose impatience was by now quite beyond control, sat down beside the hearth, in such a way as to command a view of the door. Desgas had been gone nearly a quarter of an hour. It was quite plain to Marguerite's aching senses that, as soon as he arrived, Chauvelin would abandon all his other plans with regard to the fugitives, and capture this impudent Scarlet Pimpernel at once.

"Hey, M. Chauvelin," the latter was saying airily, "tell me, I pray you, is your friend pretty? Demmed smart these little French women sometimes—what? But I protest I need not ask," he added, as he carelessly strode back towards the supper-table. "In matters of taste the Church has never been backward. . . . Eh?"

But Chauvelin was not listening. His every faculty was now concentrated on that door through which presently Desgas would enter. Marguerite's thoughts, too, were centred there, for her ears had suddenly caught, through the stillness of the night, the sound of numerous and measured treads some distance away.

It was Desgas and his men. Another three minutes and they would be here! Another three minutes and the awful thing would have occurred: the brave eagle will have fallen in the ferrets' trap! She would have moved now and screamed, but she dared not; for whilst she heard the soldiers approaching, she was looking at Percy and watching his every movement. He was standing by the table whereon the remnants of the supper, plates, glasses, spoons, salt and pepper-pots were scattered pell-mell. His back was turned to Chauvelin and he was still prattling along in his own affected and inane way, but from his pocket he had taken his snuff-box, and quickly and suddenly he emptied the contents of the pepper-pot into it.

Then he again turned with an inane laugh to Chauvelin—

"Eh? Did you speak, sir?"

Chauvelin had been too intent on listening to the sound of those approaching footsteps, to notice what his cunning adversary had been doing. He now pulled himself together, trying to look unconcerned in the very midst of his anticipated triumph.

"No," he said presently, "that is—as you were saying, Sir Percy——?"

"I was saying," said Blakeney, going up to Chauvelin, by the fire, "that the Jew in Piccadilly has sold me better snuff this time than I have ever tasted. Will you honour me, Monsieur l'Abbé?"

He stood close to Chauvelin in his own careless, *débonnaire* way, holding out his snuff-box to his arch-enemy.

Chauvelin, who, as he told Marguerite once, had seen a trick or two in his day, had never dreamed of this one. With one ear fixed on those fast approaching footsteps, one eye to that door where Desgas and his men would presently appear, lulled into false security by the impudent Englishman's airy manner, he never even remotely guessed the trick which was being played upon him.

He took a pinch of snuff.

Only he, who has ever by accident sniffed vigorously a dose of pepper, can have the faintest conception of the hopeless condition to which such a sniff would reduce any human being.

Chauvelin felt as if his head would burst—sneeze after sneeze seemed nearly to choke him; he was blind, deaf, and dumb for the moment, and during that moment Blakeney quietly, without the slightest haste, took up his hat, took some money out of his pocket which he left on the table, then calmly stalked out of the room!

26

THE JEW

It took Marguerite some time to collect her scattered senses; the whole of this last short episode had taken place in less than a minute, and Desgas and the soldiers were still about two hundred yards away from the *Chat Gris*.

When she realized what had happened a curious mixture of joy and wonder filled her heart. It all was so neat, so ingenious. Chauvelin was still absolutely helpless, far more so than he could even have been under a blow from the fist, for now he could neither see, nor hear, nor speak, whilst his cunning adversary had quietly slipped through his fingers.

Blakeney was gone, obviously to try and join the fugitives at the Père Blanchard's hut. For the moment, true, Chauvelin was helpless; for the moment the daring Scarlet Pimpernel had not been caught by Desgas and his men. But all the roads and the beach were patrolled. Every place was watched, and every stranger kept in sight. How far could Percy go, thus arrayed in his gorgeous clothes, without being sighted and followed?

Now she blamed herself terribly for not having gone down to him sooner, and given him that word of warning and of love which, perhaps, after all, he needed. He could not know of the orders which Chauvelin had given for his capture, and even now perhaps . . .

But before all these horrible thoughts had taken concrete form in her brain, she heard the grounding of arms outside, close to the door, and Desgas' voice shouting "Halt!" to his men.

Chauvelin had partially recovered; his sneezing had become less violent, and he had struggled to his feet. He managed to reach the door just as Desgas' knock was heard on the outside.

Chauvelin threw open the door, and before his secretary could say a word, he had managed to stammer between two sneezes—

"The tall stranger—quick!—did any of you see him?"

"Where, citoyen?" asked Desgas, in surprise.

"Here, man! through that door! not five minutes ago."

"We saw nothing, citoyen! The moon is not yet up and . . ."

"And you are just five minutes too late, my friend," said Chauvelin, with concentrated fury.

"Citoyen . . . I . . ."

"You did what I ordered you to do," said Chauvelin with impatience. "I know that, but you were a precious long time about it. Fortunately, there's not much harm done, or it had fared ill with you, Citoyen Desgas."

Desgas turned a little pale. There was so much rage and hatred in his superior's whole attitude.

"The tall stranger, citoyen——" he stammered.

"Was here, in this room, five minutes ago, having supper at that table. Damn his impudence! For obvious reasons, I dared not tackle him alone.

Brogard is too big a fool, and that cursed Englishman appears to have the strength of a bullock, and so he slipped away under your very nose."

"He cannot go far without being sighted, citoyen."

"Ah?"

"Captain Jutley sent forty men as reinforcements for the patrol duty: twenty went down to the beach. He again assured me that the watch has been constant all day, and that no stranger could possibly get to the beach, or reach a boat, without being sighted."

"That's good.—Do the men know their work?"

"They have had very clear orders, citoyen: and I myself spoke to those who were about to start. They are to shadow—as secretly as possible—any stranger they may see, especially if he be tall, or stoop as if he would disguise his height."

"In no case to detain such a person, of course," said Chauvelin, eagerly. "That impudent Scarlet Pimpernel would slip through clumsy fingers. We must let him get to the Père Blanchard's hut now; there surround and capture him."

"The men understand that, citoyen, and also that, as soon as a tall stranger has been sighted, he must be shadowed whilst one man is to turn straight back and report to you."

"That is right," said Chauvelin, rubbing his hands, well pleased.

"I have further news for you, citoyen."

"What is it?"

"A tall Englishman had a long conversation about three-quarters of an hour ago with a Jew, Reuben by name, who lives not ten paces from here."

"Yes—and?" queried Chauvelin, impatiently.

"The conversation was all about a horse and cart, which the tall Englishman wished to hire, and which was to have been ready for him by eleven o'clock."

"It is past that now. Where does that Reuben live?"

"A few minutes' walk from this door."

"Send one of the men to find out if the stranger has driven off in Reuben's cart."

"Yes, citoyen."

Desgas went to give the necessary orders to one of the men. Not a word of this conversation between him and Chauvelin had escaped Marguerite, and every word they had spoken seemed to strike at her heart, with terrible hopelessness and dark foreboding.

She had come all this way, and with such high hopes and firm determination to help her husband, and so far she had been able to do nothing, but to watch, with a heart breaking with anguish, the meshes of the deadly net closing round the daring Scarlet Pimpernel.

He could not now advance many steps, without spying eyes to track and denounce him. Her own helplessness struck her with the terrible sense of utter disappointment. The possibility of being of the slightest use to her husband had become almost *nil*, and her only hope rested in being allowed to share his fate, whatever it might ultimately be.

For the moment, even her chance of ever seeing the man she loved again had become a remote one. Still, she was determined to keep a close watch over his enemy, and a vague hope filled her heart that whilst she kept Chauvelin in sight, Percy's fate might still be hanging in the balance.

Desgas had left Chauvelin moodily pacing up and down the room, whilst he himself waited outside for the return of the man, whom he had sent in search of Reuben. Thus several minutes went by. Chauvelin was evidently devoured with impatience. Apparently he trusted no one: this last trick played upon him by the daring Scarlet Pimpernel had made him suddenly doubtful of success, unless he himself was there to watch, direct and superintend the capture of this impudent Englishman.

About five minutes later, Desgas returned, followed by an elderly Jew in a dirty, threadbare gaberdine, worn greasy across the shoulders. His red hair, which he wore after the fashion of the Polish Jews, with the corkscrew curls each side of his face, was plentifully sprinkled with grey—a general coating of grime about his cheeks and his chin gave him a peculiarly dirty and loathsome appearance. He had the habitual stoop those of his race affected in mock humility in past centuries, before the dawn of equality and freedom in matters of faith, and he walked behind Desgas with the peculiar shuffling gait which has remained the characteristic of the Jew trader in continental Europe to this day.

Chauvelin, who had all the Frenchman's prejudice against the despised race, motioned to the fellow to keep at a respectful distance. The group of the three men were standing just underneath the hanging oil-lamp, and Marguerite had a clear view of them all.

"Is this the man?" asked Chauvelin.

"No, citoyen," replied Desgas, "Reuben could not be found, so presumably his cart has gone with the stranger: but this man here seems to know something, which he is willing to sell for a consideration."

"Ah!" said Chauvelin, turning away with disgust from the loathsome specimen of humanity before him.

The Jew, with characteristic patience, stood humbly on one side, leaning on a thick knotted staff, his greasy, broad-brimmed hat casting a deep shadow over his grimy face, waiting for the noble Excellency to deign to put some questions to him.

"The citoyen tells me," said Chauvelin peremptorily to him, "that you know something of my friend, the tall Englishman, whom I desire to meet. . . . Morbleu! keep your distance, man," he added hurriedly, as the Jew took a quick and eager step forward.

"Yes, your Excellency," replied the Jew, who spoke the language with that peculiar lisp, which denotes Eastern origin, "I and Reuben Goldstein met a tall Englishman, on the road, close by here this evening."

"Did you speak to him?"

"He spoke to us, your Excellency. He wanted to know if he could hire a horse and cart to go down along the St. Martin Road, to a place he wanted to reach to-night."

"What did you say?"

"I did not say anything," said the Jew in an injured tone. "Reuben Goldstein, that accursed traitor, that son of Belial . . ."

"Cut that short, man," interrupted Chauvelin, roughly, "and go on with your story."

"He took the words out of my mouth, your Excellency; when I was about to offer the wealthy Englishman my horse and cart, to take him wheresoever he chose, Reuben had already spoken, and offered his half-starved nag, and his broken-down cart."

"And what did the Englishman do?"

"He listened to Reuben Goldstein, your Excellency, and put his hand in his pocket then and there, and took out a handful of gold, which he showed to that descendant of Belzebub, telling him that all that would be his if the horse and cart were ready for him by eleven o'clock."

"And, of course, the horse and cart were ready?"

"Well! they were ready in a manner, so to speak, your Excellency. Reuben's nag was lame as usual; she refused to budge at first. It was only after a time and with plenty of kicks, that she at last could be made to move," said the Jew with a malicious chuckle.

"Then they started?"

"Yes, they started about five minutes ago. I was disgusted with that stranger's folly. An Englishman too!—He ought to have known Reuben's nag was not fit to drive."

"But if he had no choice?"

"No choice, your Excellency?" protested the Jew, in a rasping voice, "did I not repeat to him a dozen times that my horse and cart would take him quicker, and more comfortably than Reuben's bag of bones. He would not listen. Reuben is such a liar, and has such insinuating ways. The stranger was deceived. If he was in a hurry, he would have had better value for his money by taking my cart."

"You have a horse and cart too, then?" asked Chauvelin peremptorily.

"Aye! that I have, your Excellency, and if your Excellency wants to drive . . ."

"Do you happen to know which way my friend went in Reuben Goldstein's cart?"

Thoughtfully the Jew rubbed his dirty chin. Marguerite's heart was beating wellnigh to bursting. She had heard the peremptory question; she looked anxiously at the Jew, but could not read his face beneath the shadow of his broad-brimmed hat. Vaguely she felt somehow as if he held Percy's fate in his long, dirty hands.

There was a long pause, whilst Chauvelin frowned impatiently at the stooping figure before him; at last the Jew slowly put his hand in his breast pocket, and drew out from its capacious depths a number of silver coins. He gazed at them thoughtfully, then remarked, in a quiet tone of voice—

"This is what the tall stranger gave me, when he drove away with Reuben, for holding my tongue about him and his doings."

Chauvelin shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"How much is there there?" he asked.

"Twenty francs, your Excellency," replied the Jew, "and I have been an honest man all my life."

Chauvelin without further comment took a few pieces of gold out of his own pocket, and leaving them in the palm of his hand, he allowed them to jingle as he held them out towards the Jew.

"How many gold pieces are there in the palm of my hand?" he asked quietly.

Evidently he had no desire to terrorize the man, but to conciliate him, for his own purposes, for his manner was pleasant and suave. No doubt he feared that threats of the guillotine, and various other persuasive methods of that type, might addle the old man's brains, and that he would be more likely to be useful through greed of gain than through terror of death.

The eyes of the Jew shot a quick, keen glance at the gold in his interlocutor's hand.

"At least five, I should say, your Excellency," he replied obsequiously.

"Enough, do you think, to loosen that honest tongue of yours?"

"What does your Excellency wish to know?"

"Whether your horse and cart can take me to where I can find my friend the tall stranger, who has driven off in Reuben Goldstein's cart?"

"My horse and cart can take your Honour there, when you please."

"To a place called the Père Blanchard's hut?"

"Your Honour has guessed?" said the Jew in astonishment.

"You know the place?"

"I know it, your Honour."

"Which road leads to it?"

"The St. Martin road, your Honour, then a footpath from there to the cliffs."

"You know the road?" repeated Chauvelin roughly.

"Every stone, every blade of grass, your Honour," replied the Jew quietly.

Chauvelin without another word threw the five pieces of gold one by one before the Jew, who knelt down; and on his hands and knees struggled to collect them. One rolled away, and he had some trouble to get it, for it had lodged underneath the dresser. Chauvelin quietly waited while the old man scrambled on the floor, to find the piece of gold.

When the Jew was again on his feet, Chauvelin said—

"How soon can your horse and cart be ready?"

"They are ready now, your Honour."

"Where?"

"Not ten mètres from this door. Will your Excellency deign to look?"

"I don't want to see it. How far can you drive me in it?"

"As far as the Père Blanchard's hut, your Honour, and farther than Reuben's nag took your friend. I am sure that not two leagues from here we shall come across that wily Reuben, his nag, his cart and the tall stranger all in a heap in the middle of the road."

"How far is the nearest village from here?"

"On the road which the Englishman took, Miquelon is the nearest village not two leagues from here."

"There he could get fresh conveyance, if he wanted to go farther?"

"He could—if he ever got so far."

"Can you?"

"Will your Excellency try?" said the Jew simply.

"That is my intention," said Chauvelin very quietly, "but remember, if you have deceived me, I shall tell off two of my most stalwart soldiers to give you such a beating, that your breath will perhaps leave your ugly body for ever. But if we find my friend the tall Englishman, either on the road or at the Père Blanchard's hut, there will be ten more gold pieces for you. Do you accept the bargain?"

The Jew again thoughtfully rubbed his chin. He looked at the money in his hand, then at his stern interlocutor, and at Desgas, who had stood silently behind him all this while. After a moment's pause, he said deliberately—

"I accept."

"Go and wait outside then," said Chauvelin, "and remember to stick to your bargain, or by Heaven, I will keep to mine."

With a final, most abject and cringing bow, the old Jew shuffled out of the room. Chauvelin seemed pleased with his interview, for he rubbed his hands together, with that usual gesture of his, of malignant satisfaction.

"My coat and boots," he said to Desgas at last.

Desgas went to the door, and apparently gave the necessary orders, for presently a soldier entered, carrying Chauvelin's coat, boots, and hat.

He took off his soutane, beneath which he was wearing close-fitting breeches and a cloth waistcoat, and began changing his attire.

"You, citoyen, in the meanwhile," he said to Desgas, "go back to Captain Jutley as fast as you can, and tell him to let you have another dozen men, and bring them with you along the St. Martin road, where I dare say you will soon overtake the Jew's cart with myself in it. There will be hot work presently, if I mistake not, in the Père Blanchard's hut. We shall corner our game there, I'll warrant, for this impudent Scarlet Pimpernel has had the audacity—or the stupidity, I hardly know which—to adhere to his original plans. He has gone to meet de Tournay, St. Just and the other traitors, which for the moment, I thought, perhaps, he did not intend to do. When we find them, there will be a band of desperate men at bay. Some of our men will, I presume, be put hors de combat. These royalists are good swordsmen, and the Englishman is devilish cunning, and looks very powerful. Still, we shall be five against one at least. You can follow the cart closely with your men, all along the St. Martin road, through Miquelon. The Englishman is ahead of us, and not likely to look behind him."

Whilst he gave these curt and concise orders, he had completed his change of attire. The priest's costume had been laid aside, and he was once more dressed in his usual dark, tight-fitting clothes. At last he took up his hat.

"I shall have an interesting prisoner to deliver into your hands," he said with a chuckle, as with unwonted familiarity he took Desgas' arm and led him towards the door. "We won't kill him outright, eh, friend Desgas? The Père Blanchard's hut is—an I mistake not—a lonely spot upon the beach, and our men will enjoy a bit of rough sport there with the wounded fox. Choose your men well, friend Desgas . . . of the sort who would enjoy that type of sport—eh? We must see that Scarlet Pimpernel wither a bit—what?—shrink and tremble, eh? . . . before we finally . . ." —he made an expressive gesture, whilst he laughed a low, evil laugh, which filled Marguerite's soul with sickening horror.

"Choose your men well, Citoyen Desgas," he said once more, as he led his secretary finally out of the room.

27

ON THE TRACK

NEVER for a moment did Marguerite Blakeney hesitate. The last sounds outside the *Chat Gris* had died away in the night. She had heard Desgas giving orders to his men, and then starting off towards the fort, to get a reinforcement of a dozen more men: six were not thought sufficient to capture the cunning Englishman, whose resourceful brain was even more dangerous than his valour and his strength.

Then, a few minutes later, she heard the Jew's husky voice again, evidently shouting to his nag, then the rumble of wheels, and noise of a rickety cart bumping over the rough road.

Inside the inn, everything was still. Brogard and his wife, terrified of Chauvelin, had given no sign of life: they hoped to be forgotten, and at any rate to remain unperceived; Marguerite could not even hear their usual volleys of muttered oaths.

She waited a moment or two longer, then she quietly slipped down the broken stairs, wrapped her dark cloak closely round her, and slipped out of the inn.

The night was fairly dark, sufficiently so at any rate to hide her dark figure from view, whilst her keen ears kept count of the sound of the cart going on ahead. She hoped by keeping well within the shadow of the ditches which lined the road, that she would not be seen by Desgas' men, when they approached, or by the patrols which she concluded were still on duty.

Thus she started to do this, the last stage of her weary journey, alone, at night, and on foot. Nearly three leagues to Miquelon, and then on to the Père Blanchard's hut, wherever that fatal spot might be, probably over rough roads: she cared not.

The Jew's nag could not get on very fast, and though she was weary with mental fatigue and nerve strain, she knew that she could easily keep up with it, on a hilly road, where the poor beast—who was sure to be half-starved, would have to be allowed long and frequent rests. The road lay some distance from the sea, bordered on either side by shrubs and stunted trees, sparsely covered with meagre foliage, all turning away from the North, with their branches looking in the semi-darkness like stiff, ghostly hair, blown by a perpetual wind.

Fortunately, the moon showed no desire to peep between the clouds, and Marguerite, hugging the edge of the road, and keeping close to the low line of shrubs, was fairly safe from view. Everything around her was so still: only from far, very far away, there came, like a long soft moan, the sound of the distant sea.

The air was keen and full of brine; after that enforced period of inactivity, inside the evil-smelling, squalid inn, Marguerite would have enjoyed the sweet scent of this autumnal night, and the distant melancholy rumble of the waves; she would have revelled in the calm and stillness of this lonely spot, a calm, broken only at intervals by the strident and mournful cry of some distant gull, and by the creaking of the wheels, some way down the road: she would have loved the cool atmosphere, the peaceful immensity of Nature, in this lonely part of the coast: but her heart was too full of cruel foreboding, of a great ache and longing for a being who had become infinitely dear to her.

Her feet slipped on the grassy bank, for she thought it safest not to walk near the centre of the road, and she found it difficult to keep up a sharp pace along the muddy incline. She even thought it best not to keep too near to the cart; everything was so still, that the rumble of the wheels could not fail to be a safe guide.

The loneliness was absolute. Already the few dim lights of Calais lay far behind, and on this road there was not a sign of human habitation, not even the hut of a fisherman or of a woodcutter anywhere near; far away on her right was the edge of the cliff, below it the rough beach, against which the incoming tide was dashing itself with its constant, distant murmur. And ahead the rumble of the wheels, bearing an implacable enemy to his triumph.

Marguerite wondered at what particular spot, on this lonely coast, Percy could be at this moment. Not very far surely, for he had had less than a quarter of an hour's start of Chauvelin. She wondered if he knew that in this cool, ocean-scented bit of France there lurked many spies, all eager to sight his tall figure, to track him to where his unsuspecting friends waited for him, and then, to close the net over him and them.

Chauvelin, on ahead, jolted and jostled in the Jew's vehicle, was nursing comfortable thoughts. He rubbed his hands together, with content, as he thought of the web which he had woven, and through which that ubiquitous and daring Englishman could not hope to escape. As the time went on, and the old Jew drove him leisurely but surely along the dark road, he felt more and more eager for the grand finale of this exciting chase after the mysterious Scarlet Pimpernel.

The capture of the audacious plotter would be the finest leaf in Citoyen Chauvelin's wreath of glory. Caught, red-handed, on the spot, in the very act of aiding and abetting the traitors against the Republic of France, the Englishman could claim no protection from his own country. Chauvelin had, in any case, fully made up his mind that all intervention should come too late.

Never for a moment did the slightest remorse enter his heart, as to the terrible position in which he had placed the unfortunate wife, who had unconsciously betrayed her husband. As a matter of fact, Chauvelin had ceased even to think of her: she had been a useful tool that was all.

The Jew's lean nag did little more than walk. She was going along at a slow jog trot, and her driver had to give her long and frequent halts.

"Are we a long way yet from Miquelon?" asked Chauvelin from time to time.

"Not very far, your Honour," was the uniform placid reply.

"We have not yet come across your friend and mine, lying in a heap in the roadway," was Chauvelin's sarcastic comment.

"Patience, noble Excellency," rejoined the son of Moses, "they are ahead of us. I can see the imprint of the cart wheels, driven by that traitor, that son of the Amalekite."

"You are sure of the road?"

"As sure as I am of the presence of those ten gold pieces in the noble Excellency's pockets, which I trust will presently be mine."

"As soon as I have shaken hands with my friend the tall stranger, they will certainly be yours."

"Hark! what was that?" said the Jew suddenly.

Through the stillness, which had been absolute, there could now be heard distinctly the sound of horses' hoofs on the muddy road.

"They are soldiers," he added in an awed whisper.

"Stop a moment, I want to hear," said Chauvelin.

Marguerite had also heard the sound of galloping hoofs, coming towards the cart, and towards herself. For some time she had been on the alert, thinking that Desgas and his squad would soon overtake them, but these came from the opposite direction, presumably from Miquelon. The darkness lent her sufficient cover. She had perceived that the cart had stopped, and with utmost caution, treading noiselessly on the soft road, she crept a little nearer.

Her heart was beating fast, she was trembling in every limb; already she had guessed what news these mounted men would bring: "Every stranger on these roads or on the beach must be shadowed, especially if he be tall or stoops as if he would disguise his height; when sighted a mounted messenger must at once ride back and report." Those had been Chauvelin's orders. Had then the tall stranger been sighted, and was this the mounted messenger, come to bring the great news, that the hunted hare had run its head into the noose at last?

Marguerite, realizing that the cart had come to a standstill, managed to slip nearer to it in the darkness; she crept close up, hoping to get within earshot, to hear what the messenger had to say.

She heard the quick words of challenge—

"Liberté, Fraternité, Egalité!" then Chauvelin's quick query—

"What news?"

Two men on horseback had halted beside the vehicle.

Marguerite could see them silhouetted against the midnight sky. She could hear their voices, and the snorting of their horses, and now, behind her, some little distance off, the regular and measured tread of a body of advancing men: Desgas and his soldiers.

There had been a long pause, during which, no doubt, Chauvelin satsified the men as to his identity, for presently, questions and answers followed each other in quick succession.

"You have seen the stranger?" asked Chauvelin eagerly.

"No, citoyen, we have seen no tall stranger; we came by the edge of the cliff."

"Then?"

"Less than a quarter of a league beyond Miquelon, we came across a rough construction of wood, which looked like the hut of a fisherman, where he might keep his tools and nets. When we first sighted it, it seemed to be empty, and, at first we thought that there was nothing suspicious about it, until we saw some smoke issuing through an aperture at the side. I dismounted and crept close to it. It was then empty, but in one corner of the hut there was a charcoal fire, and a couple of stools were also in the hut. I consulted with my comrades, and we decided that they should take cover with the horses, well out of sight, and that I should remain on the watch, which I did."

"Well! and did you see anything?"

"About half an hour later, I heard voices, citoyen, and presently, two men came along towards the edge of the cliff; they seemed to me to have come from the Lille road. One was young, the other quite old. They were talking in a whisper to one another, and I could not hear what they said."

One was young, the other quite old. Marguerite's aching heart almost stopped beating as she listened: was the young one Armand?—her brother?—and the old one de Tournay?—were they the two fugitives who, unconsciously, were used as a decoy, to entrap their fearless and noble rescuer?

"The two men presently went into the hut," continued the soldier, whilst Marguerite's aching nerves seemed to catch the sound of Chauvelin's triumphant chuckle, "and I crept nearer to it then. The hut is very roughly built, and I caught snatches of their conversation."

"Yes?—Quick!—What did you hear?"

"The old man asked the young one if he were sure that was the right place. 'Oh, yes,' he replied, "tis the place sure enough,' and by the light of the charcoal fire he showed to his companion a paper which he carried. 'Here is the plan,' he said, 'which he gave me before I left London. We were to adhere strictly to that plan, unless I had contrary orders, and I have had none. Here is the road we followed, see . . . here the fork . . . here we cut across the St. Martin road . . . and here is the footpath which brought us to the edge of the cliff.' I must have made a slight noise then, for the young man came to the door of the hut, and peered anxiously all round him. When he again joined his companion, they whispered so low that I could no longer hear them."

"Well? and?" asked Chauvelin impatiently.

"There were six of us altogether, patrolling that part of the beach, so we consulted together, and thought it best that four should remain behind and keep the hut in sight, and I and my comrade rode back at once to make report of what we had seen."

"You saw nothing of the tall stranger?"

"Nothing, citoyen."

"If your comrades see him, what would they do?"

"Not lose sight of him for a moment, and if he showed signs of escape, or any boat came in sight, they would close in on him, and if necessary, they would shoot: the firing would bring the rest of the patrol to the spot. In any case they would not let the stranger go."

"Aye! but I did not want the stranger hurt—not just yet," murmured Chauvelin savagely, "but there, you've done your best. The Fates grant that I may not be too late. . . ."

"We met half a dozen men just now, who have been patrolling this road for several hours."

"Well?"

"They have seen no stranger either."

"Yet he is on ahead somewhere, in a cart or else . . . Here! there is not a moment to lose. How far is that hut from here?"

"About a couple of leagues, citoyen."

"You can find it again?—at once?—without hesitation?"

"I have absolutely no doubt, citoyen."

"The footpath, to the edge of the cliff?—Even in the dark?"

"It is not a dark night, citoyen, and I know I can find my way," repeated the soldier firmly.

"Fall in behind then. Let your comrade take both your horses back to Calais. You won't want them. Keep beside the cart, and direct the Jew to drive straight ahead; then stop him, within a quarter of a league of the footpath; see that he takes the most direct road."

Whilst Chauvelin spoke, Desgas and his men were fast approaching, and Marguerite could hear their footsteps within a hundred yards behind her now. She thought it unsafe to stay where she was, and unnecessary too, as she had heard enough. She seemed suddenly to have lost all faculty even for suffering; her heart, her nerves, her brain seemed to have become numb after all these hours of ceaseless anguish, culminating in this awful despair.

For now there was absolutely not the faintest hope. Within two short leagues of this spot, the fugitives were waiting for their brave deliverer. He was on his way, somewhere on this lonely road, and presently he would join them; then the well-laid trap would close, two dozen men, led by one whose hatred was as deadly as his cunning was malicious, would close round the small band of fugitives and their daring leader. They would all be captured. Armand, according to Chauvelin's pledged word, would be restored to her, but her husband, Percy, whom with every breath she drew she seemed to love and worship more and more, he would fall into the hands of a remorseless enemy, who had no pity for a brave heart, no admiration for the courage of a noble soul, who would show nothing but hatred for the cunning antagonist, who had baffled him so long.

She heard the soldier giving a few brief directions to the Jew, then she retired quickly to the edge of the road, and cowered behind some low shrubs, whilst Desgas and his men came up.

All fell in noiselessly behind the cart, and slowly they all started down the dark road. Marguerite waited until she reckoned that they were well outside the range of earshot, then she, too, in the darkness, which suddenly seemed to have become more intense, crept noiselessly along.

28

THE PÈRE BLANCHARD'S HUT

As in a dream, Marguerite followed on; the web was drawing more and more tightly every moment round the beloved life, which had become dearer than all. To see her husband once again, to tell him how she had suffered, how much she had wronged, and how little understood him, had become now her only aim. She had abandoned all hope of saving him: she saw him gradually hemmed in on all sides, and, in despair, she gazed round her into the darkness, and wondered whence he would presently come, to fall into the death-trap which his relentless enemy had prepared for him.

The distant roar of the waves now made her shudder; the occasional dismal cry of an owl, or a sea-gull, filled her with unspeakable horror. She thought of the ravenous beasts—in human shape—who lay in wait for their prey, and destroyed them as mercilessly as any hungry wolf, for the satisfaction of their own appetite of hate. Marguerite was not afraid of the darkness, she only feared that man, on ahead, who was sitting at the bottom of a rough wooden cart, nursing thoughts of vengeance which would have made the very demons in hell chuckle with delight.

Her feet were sore. Her knees shook under her, from sheer bodily fatigue. For days now she had lived in a wild turmoil of excitement; she had not had a quiet rest for three nights; now, she had walked on a slippery road for nearly two hours, and yet her determination never swerved for a moment. She would see her husband, tell him all, and, if he was ready to forgive the crime which she had committed in her blind ignorance, she would yet have the happiness of dying by his side.

She must have walked on almost in a trance, instinct alone keeping her up, and guiding her in the wake of the enemy, when suddenly her ears, attuned to the slightest sound by that same blind instinct, told her that the cart had stopped, and that the soldiers had halted. They had come to their destination. No doubt on the right, somewhere close ahead, was the footpath that led to the edge of the cliff and to the hut.

Heedless of any risks, she crept quite close up to where Chauvelin stood, surrounded by his little troop: he had descended from the cart, and was giving some orders to the men. These she wanted to hear: what little chance she yet had, of being useful to Percy, consisted in hearing absolutely every word of his enemy's plans.

The spot where all the party had halted must have lain some eight hundred mètres from the coast; the sound of the sea came only very faintly, as from a distance. Chauvelin and Desgas, followed by the soldiers, had turned off sharply to the right of the road, apparently on to the footpath which led to the cliffs. The Jew had remained on the road, with his cart and nag.

Marguerite, with infinite caution, and literally crawling on her hands and knees, had also turned off to the right: to accomplish this she had to creep through the rough, low shrubs, trying to make as little noise as possible as she went along, tearing her face and hands against the dry twigs, intent only upon hearing without being seen or heard. Fortunately—as is usual in this part of France—the footpath was bordered by a low, rough hedge, beyond which was a dry ditch, filled with coarse grass. In this Marguerite managed to find shelter; she was quite hidden from view, yet could contrive to get within three yards of where Chauvelin stood giving orders to his men.

"Now," he was saying in a low and peremptory whisper, "where is the Père Blanchard's hut?"

"About eight hundred mètres from here, along the footpath," said the soldier who had lately been directing the party, "and half-way down the cliff."

"Very good. You shall lead us. Before we begin to descend the cliff, you shall creep down to the hut, as noiselessly as possible, and ascertain if the traitor royalists are there. Do you understand?"

"I understand, citoyen."

"Now listen very attentively, all of you," continued Chauvelin impressively, and addressing the soldiers collectively, "for after this we may not be able to exchange another word, so remember every syllable I utter, as if your very lives depended on your memory. Perhaps they do," he added drily.

"We listen, citoyen," said Desgas, "and a soldier of the Republic never forgets an order."

"You, who have crept up to the hut, will try to peep inside. If an Englishman is there with those traitors, a man who is tall above the average, or who stoops as if he would disguise his height, then give a sharp, quick whistle as a signal to your comrades. All of you," he added, once more speaking to the soldiers collectively, "then quickly surround and rush into the hut, and each seize one of the men there, before they have time to draw their firearms; if any of them struggle shoot at their legs or arms, but on no account kill the tall man. Do you understand?"

"We understand, citoyen."

"The man who is tall above the average, is probably also strong above the average: it will take four or five of you at least to overpower him."

There was a little pause, then Chauvelin continued—

"If the royalist traitors are still alone, which is more than likely to be the case, then warn your comrades who are lying in wait there, and all of you creep and take cover behind the rocks and boulders round the hut, and wait there, in dead silence, until the tall Englishman arrives; then only rush the hut, when he is safely within its doors. But remember, that you must be as silent as the wolf is at night, when he prowls around the pens. I do not wish those royalists to be on the alert—the firing of a pistol, a shriek or call on their part would be sufficient, perhaps, to warn the tall personage to keep clear of the cliffs and of the hut, and," he added emphatically, "it is the tall Englishman whom it is your duty to capture to-night."

"You shall be implicitly obeyed, citoyen."

"Then get along as noiselessly as possible, and I will follow you."

"What about the Jew, citoyen?" asked Desgas, as silently, like noiseless shadows, one by one the soldiers began to creep along the rough and narrow footpath.

"Ah, yes! I had forgotten the Jew," said Chauvelin, and, turning towards the Jew, he called him peremptorily.

"Here, you . . . Aaron, Moses, Abraham, or whatever your confounded name may be," he said to the old man, who had quietly stood beside his lean nag, as far away from the soldiers as possible.

"Benjamin Rosenbaum, so it please, your Honour," he replied humbly.

"It does not please me to hear your voice, but it does please me to give you certain orders, which you will find wise to obey."

"So please, your Honour . . ."

"Hold your confounded tongue. You shall stay here, do you hear? with your horse and cart until our return. You are on no account to utter the faintest sound, or to breathe even louder than you can help; nor are you, on any consideration whatever, to leave your post, until I give you orders to do so. Do you understand?"

"But, your Honour——" protested the Jew pitiably.

"There is no question of 'but' or of any argument," said Chauvelin, in a tone that made the timid old man tremble from head to foot. "If, when I return, I do not find you here, I most solemnly assure you that, wherever you may try and hide yourself, I can find you, and that punishment, swift, sure and terrible, will sooner or later overtake you. Do you hear me?"

"But, your Excellency . . ."

"I said, do you hear me?"

The soldiers had all crept away; the three men stood alone together in the dark and lonely road, with Marguerite there, behind the hedge, listening to Chauvelin's orders, as she would to her own death sentence.

"I heard, your Honour," protested the Jew again, while he tried to draw nearer to Chauvelin, "and I swear by Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that I would obey your Honour most absolutely, and that I would not move from this place until your Honour once more deigned to shed the light of your countenance upon your humble servant; but remember, your Honour, I am a poor old man; my nerves are not as strong as those of a young soldier. If midnight marauders should come prowling round this lonely road, I might scream or run in my fright! and is my life to be forfeit, is some terrible punishment to come on my poor old head for that which I cannot help?"

The Jew seemed in real distress; he was shaking from head to foot. Clearly he was not the man to be left by himself on this lonely road. The man spoke truly; he might unwittingly, in sheer terror, utter the shriek that might prove a warning to the wily Scarlet Pimpernel.

Chauvelin reflected for a moment.

"Will your horse and cart be safe alone, here, do you think?" he asked roughly.

"I fancy, citoyen," here interposed Desgas, "that they will be safer, without that dirty, cowardly Jew, than with him. There seems no doubt that, if he gets scared, he will either make a bolt of it, or shriek his head off."

"But what am I to do with the brute?"

"Will you send him back to Calais, citoyen?"

"No, for we shall want him to drive back the wounded presently," said Chauvelin, with grim significance.

There was a pause again—Desgas, waiting for the decision of his chief, and the old Jew, whining beside his nag.

"Well, you lazy, lumbering old coward," said Chauvelin at last, "you had better shuffle along behind us. Here, Citoyen Desgas, tie this handkerchief tightly round the fellow's mouth."

Chauvelin handed a scarf to Desgas, who solemnly began winding it round the Jew's mouth. Meekly Benjamin Rosenbaum allowed himself to be gagged; he, evidently, preferred this uncomfortable state to that of being left alone on the dark St. Martin road. Then the three men fell in line.

"Quick!" said Chauvelin, impatiently, "we have already wasted much valuable time."

And the firm footsteps of Chauvelin and Desgas, the shuffling gait of the old Jew, soon died away along the footpath.

Marguerite had not lost a single one of Chauvelin's words of command. Her every nerve was strained to completely grasp the situation first, then to make a final appeal to those wits which had so often been called the sharpest in Europe, and which alone might be of service now.

Certainly the situation was desperate enough; a tiny band of unsuspecting men, quietly awaiting the arrival of their rescuer, who was equally unconscious of the trap laid for them all. It seemed so horrible, this net, as it were drawn in a circle, at dead of night, on a lonely beach, round a few defenceless men, defenceless because they were tricked and unsuspecting; of these one was the husband she idolized, another the brother she loved. She vaguely wondered who the others were, who were also calmly waiting for the Scarlet Pimpernel, while death lurked behind every boulder of the cliffs.

For the moment she could do nothing but follow the soldiers and Chauvelin. She feared to lose her way, or she would have rushed forward and found that wooden hut, and perhaps been in time to warn the fugitives and their brave deliverer yet.

For a second, the thought flashed through her mind of uttering the piercing shrieks, which Chauvelin seemed to dread, as a possible warning to the Scarlet Pimpernel and his friends—in the wild hope that they would hear, and have yet time to escape before it was too late. But she did not know how far from the edge of the cliff she was; she did not know if her shrieks would reach the ears of the doomed men. Her effort might be premature, and she would never be allowed to make another. Her mouth would be securely gagged, like that of the Jew, and she a helpless prisoner in the hands of Chauvelin's men.

Like a ghost she flitted noiselessly behind that hedge: she had taken her shoes off, and her stockings were by now torn off her feet. She felt neither soreness nor weariness; indomitable will to reach her husband in spite of adverse Fate, and of a cunning enemy, killed all sense of bodily pain within her, and rendered her instincts doubly acute.

She heard nothing save the soft and measured footsteps of Percy's enemies on in front; she saw nothing but—in her mind's eye—that wooden hut, and he, her husband, walking blindly to his doom.

Suddenly, those same keen instincts within her made her pause in her mad haste, and cower still further within the shadow of the hedge. The moon, which had proved a friend to her by remaining hidden behind a bank of clouds, now merged in all the glory of an early autumn night, and in a moment flooded the weird and lonely landscape with a rush of brilliant light.

There, not two hundred mètres ahead, was the edge of the cliff, and below, stretching far away to free and happy England, the sea rolled on smoothly and peaceably. Marguerite's gaze rested for an instant on the brilliant, silvery waters, and as she gazed her heart, which had been numb with pain for all these hours, seemed to soften and distend, and her eyes filled with hot tears: not three miles away, with white sails set, a graceful schooner lay in wait.

Marguerite had guessed rather than recognized her. It was the *Day Dream*, Percy's favourite yacht, with old Briggs, that prince of skippers, aboard, and all her crew of British sailors; her white sails, glistening in the moonlight, seemed to convey a message to Marguerite of joy and hope, which yet she feared could never be. She waited there, out at sea, waited for her master, like a beautiful white bird all ready to take flight, and he would never reach her, never see her smooth deck again, never gaze any more on the white cliffs of England, the land of liberty and of hope.

The sight of the schooner seemed to infuse into the poor, wearied woman the superhuman strength of despair. There was the edge of the cliff, and some way below was the hut, where, presently, her husband would meet his death. But the moon was out: she could see her way now: she would see the hut from a distance, run to it, rouse them all, warn them at any rate to be prepared and to sell their lives dearly, rather than be caught like so many rats in a hole.

She stumbled on behind the hedge in the low, thick grass of the ditch. She must have run on very fast, and had outdistanced Chauvelin and Desgas, for presently she reached the edge of the cliff, and heard their footsteps distinctly behind her. But only a very few yards away, and now the moonlight was full upon her, her figure must have been distinctly silhouetted against the silvery background of the sea.

Only for a moment, though; the next she had cowered, like some animal doubled up within itself. She peeped down the great rugged cliffs—the descent would be easy enough, as they were not precipitous, and the great boulders afforded plenty of foothold. Suddenly, as she gazed, she saw at some little distance on her left, and about midway down the cliffs, a rough wooden construction, through the walls of which a tiny red light glimmered like a beacon. Her very heart seemed to stand still, the eagerness of joy was so great, that it felt like an awful pain.

She could not gauge how distant the hut was, but without hesitation she began the steep descent, creeping from boulder to boulder, caring nothing for the enemy behind, or for the soldiers, who evidently had all taken cover, since the tall Englishman had not yet appeared.

On she pressed, forgetting the deadly foe on her track, running, stumbling, foot-sore, half dazed, but still on . . . When, suddenly, a crevice, or stone, or slippery bit of rock, threw her violently to the ground. She struggled again to her feet, and started running forward once more to give them that timely warning, to beg them to flee before he came, and to tell him to keep away—away from this death-trap—away from this awful doom. But now she realized that other steps, quicker than her own, were already close at her heels. The next instant a hand dragged at her skirt, and she was down on her knees again, whilst something was wound round her mouth to prevent her uttering a scream.

Bewildered, half frantic with the bitterness of disappointment, she looked round her helplessly, and, bending down quite close to her, she saw through the mist, which seemed to gather round her, a pair of keen, malicious eyes, which appeared to her excited brain to have a weird, supernatural green light in them.

She lay in the shadow of a great boulder; Chauvelin could not see her features, but he passed his thin, white fingers over her face.

"A woman!" he whispered, "by all the saints in the calendar."

"We cannot let her loose, that's certain," he muttered to himself. "I wonder now . . ."

Suddenly he paused, and after a few seconds of deadly silence, he gave forth a long, low curious chuckle, while once again Marguerite felt, with a horrible shudder, his thin fingers wandering over her face.

"Dear me! dear me!" he whispered, with affected gallantry, "this is indeed a charming surprise," and Marquerite felt her resistless hand raised to Chauvelin's thin, mocking lips.

The situation was indeed grotesque, had it not been at the same time so fearfully tragic: the poor, weary woman, broken in spirit, and half frantic with the bitterness of her disappointment, receiving on her knees the *banal* gallantries of her deadly enemy.

Her senses were leaving her; half choked with the tight grip round her mouth, she had no strength to move or to utter the faintest sound. The excitement which all along had kept up her delicate body, seemed at once to have subsided, and the feeling of blank despair to have completely paralysed her brain and nerves.

Chauvelin must have given some directions, which she was too dazed to hear, for she felt herself lifted from off her feet: the bandage round her mouth was made more secure, and a pair of strong arms carried her toward that tiny, red light, on ahead, which she had looked upon as a beacon and the last faint glimmer of hope.

29

TRAPPED

She did not know how long she was thus carried along; she had lost all notion of time and space, and for a few seconds tired nature, mercifully, deprived her of consciousness.

When she once more realized her state, she felt that she was placed with some degree of comfort upon a man's coat with her back resting against a fragment of rock. The moon was hidden again behind some clouds, and the darkness seemed in comparison more intense. The sea was roaring some two hundred feet below her, and on looking all round she could no longer see any vestige of the tiny glimmer of red light.

That the end of the journey had been reached, she gathered from the fact that she heard rapid questions and answers spoken in a whisper quite close to her.

"There are four men in there, citoyen; they are sitting by the fire, and seem to be waiting quietly."

"The hour?"

"Nearly two o'clock."

"The tide?"

"Coming in quickly."

"The schooner?"

"Obviously an English one, lying some three kilometres out. But we cannot see her boat."

"Have the men taken cover?"

"Yes, citoyen."

"They will not blunder?"

"They will not stir until the tall Englishman comes, then they will surround and overpower the five men."

"Right. And the lady?"

"Still dazed, I fancy. She's close beside you, citoyen."

"And the Jew?"

"He's gagged, and his legs strapped together. He cannot move or scream."

"Good. Then have your gun ready, in case you want it. Get close to the hut and leave me to look after the lady."

Desgas evidently obeyed, for Marguerite heard him creeping away along the stony cliff, then she felt that a pair of warm, thin, talon-like hands took hold of both her own, and held them in a grip of steel.

"Before that handkerchief is removed from your pretty mouth, fair lady," whispered Chauvelin close to her ear, "I think it right to give you one small word of warning. What has procured me the honour of being followed across the Channel by so charming a companion, I cannot, of course, conceive, but, if I mistake not, the purpose of this flattering attention is not one that would commend itself to my vanity, and I think that I am right in surmising, moreover, that the first sound which your pretty lips would utter, as soon as the cruel gag is removed, would be one that would perhaps prove a warning to the cunning fox, which I have been at such pains to track to his lair."

He paused a moment, while the steel-like grasp seemed to tighten round her wrist; then he resumed in the same hurried whisper—

"Inside that hut, if again I am not mistaken, your brother, Armand St. Just, waits with that traitor de

Tournay, and two other men unknown to you, for the arrival of the mysterious rescuer, whose identity has for so long puzzled our Committee of Public Safety—the audacious Scarlet Pimpernel. No doubt if you scream, if there is a scuffle here, if shots are fired, it is more than likely that the same long legs that brought this scarlet enigma here, will as quickly take him to some place of safety. The purpose then, for which I have travelled all these miles, will remain unaccomplished. On the other hand, it only rests with yourself that your brother—Armand—shall be free to go off with you to-night if you like, to England, or any other place of safety."

Marguerite could not utter a sound, as the handkerchief was wound very tightly round her mouth, but Chauvelin was peering through the darkness very closely into her face; no doubt, too, her hand gave a responsive appeal to his last suggestion, for presently he continued—

"What I want you to do to ensure Armand's safety is a very simple thing, dear lady."

"What is it?" Marguerite's hand seemed to convey to his, in response.

"To remain—on this spot, without uttering a sound, until I give you leave to speak. Ah! but I think you will obey," he added, with that funny dry chuckle of his, as Marguerite's whole figure seemed to stiffen, in defiance of this order, "for let me tell you that if you scream, nay! if you utter one sound, or attempt to move from here, my men—there are thirty of them about—will seize St. Just, de Tournay, and their two friends, and shoot them here—by my orders—before your eyes."

Marguerite had listened to her implacable enemy's speech with ever-increasing terror. Numbed with physical pain, she yet had sufficient mental vitality in her to realize the full horror of this terrible "either—or," he was once more putting before her; an "either—or," ten thousand times more appalling and horrible than the one he had suggested to her that fatal night at the ball.

This time it meant that she should keep still and allow the husband she worshipped to walk unconsciously to his death, or that she should, by trying to give him a word of warning, which perhaps might even be unavailing, actually give the signal for her own brother's death, and that of three other unsuspecting men.

She could not see Chauvelin, but she could almost feel those keen, pale eyes of his fixed maliciously upon her helpless form, and his hurried, whispered words reached her ear, as the death-knell of her last faint, lingering hope.

"Nay, fair lady," he added urbanely, "you can have no interest in anyone save St. Just, and all you need do for his safety is to remain where you are, and to keep silent. My men have strict orders to spare him in every way. As for that enigmatic Scarlet Pimpernel, what is he to you? Believe me, no warning from you could possibly save him. And now, dear lady, let me remove this unpleasant coercion which has been placed before your pretty mouth. You see I wish you to be perfectly free, in the choice which you are about to make."

Her thoughts in a whirl, her temples aching, her nerves paralysed, her body numb with pain, Marguerite sat there, in the darkness which surrounded her as with a pall. From where she sat she could not see the sea, but she heard the incessant mournful murmur of the incoming tide, which spoke of her dead hopes, her lost love, the husband she had with her own hand betrayed, and sent to his death.

Chauvelin removed the handkerchief from her mouth. She certainly did not scream: at that moment, she had not strength to do anything but barely to hold herself upright, and to force herself to think.

Oh! think! think! think! of what she should do. The minutes flew on; in this awful stillness she could not tell how fast or how slowly; she heard nothing, she saw nothing: she did not feel the sweet-smelling autumn air, scented with the briny odour of the sea, she no longer heard the murmur of the waves, the occasional rattling of a pebble, as it rolled down some steep incline. More and more unreal did the whole situation seem. It was impossible that she, Marguerite Blakeney, the queen of London society, should actually be sitting here on this bit of lonely coast, in the middle of the night, side by side with a most bitter enemy: and oh! it was not possible that somewhere, not many hundred feet away, perhaps, from where she stood, the being she had once despised, but who now, in every moment of this weird, dreamlike life, became more and more dear—it was not possible that *he* was unconsciously even now walking to his doom, whilst she did nothing to save him.

Why did she not with unearthly screams, that would re-echo from one end of the lonely beach to the other, send out a warning to him to desist, to retrace his steps, for death lurked here whilst he advanced? Once or twice the screams rose in her throat—as if by instinct then, before her eyes there stood the awful alternative: her brother and those three men shot before her eyes, practically by her orders: she their murderer.

Oh! that fiend in human shape, next to her, knew human—female—nature well. He had played upon her feelings as a skilful musician plays upon an instrument. He had gauged her very thoughts to a nicety.

She could not give that signal—for she was weak, and she was a woman. How could she deliberately order Armand to be shot before her eyes, to have his dear blood upon her head, he dying perhaps with a curse on her upon his lips. And little Suzanne's father, too! he, an old man! and the others!—oh! it was all too, too horrible.

Wait! wait! wait! how long? The early morning hours sped on, and yet it was not dawn: the sea continued its incessant mournful murmur, the autumnal breeze sighed gently in the night: the lonely beach was silent, even as the grave.

Suddenly from somewhere, not very far away, a cheerful strong voice was heard singing "God save the King!"

30

THE SCHOONER

Marguerite's aching heart stood still. She felt, more than she heard, the men on the watch preparing for the fight. Her senses told her that each, with sword in hand, was crouching, ready for the spring.

The voice came nearer and nearer; in the vast immensity of these lonely cliffs, with the loud murmur of the sea below, it was impossible to say how near, or how far, nor yet from which direction came that cheerful singer, who sang to God to save his King, whilst he himself was in such deadly danger. Faint at first, the voice grew louder and louder; from time to time a small pebble detached itself apparently from beneath the firm tread of the singer, and went rolling down the rocky cliffs to the beach below.

Marguerite, as she heard, felt that her very life was slipping away, as if when that voice drew nearer, when the singer became entrapped . . .

She distinctly heard the click of Desgas' gun close to her. . . .

No! no! no! no! Oh, God in heaven! this cannot be! let Armand's blood then be upon her own head! let her be branded as his murderer! let even he, whom she loved, despise and loathe her for this, but God! oh God! save him at any cost!

With a wild shriek, she sprang to her feet, and darted round the rock, against which she had been cowering: she saw the little red gleam through the chinks of the hut; she ran up to it and fell against its wooden walls, which she began to hammer with clenched fists in an almost maniacal frenzy, while she shouted—

"Armand! Armand! for God's sake fire! your leader is near! he is coming! he is betrayed! Armand! Armand! fire in Heaven's name!"

She was seized and thrown to the ground. She lay there moaning, bruised, not caring, but still half sobbing, half shrieking—

"Percy, my husband, for God's sake fly! Armand! Armand! why don't you fire?"

"One of you stop that woman screaming," hissed Chauvelin, who hardly could refrain from striking her.

Something was thrown over her face; she could not breathe, and perforce she was silent.

The bold singer, too, had become silent, warned, no doubt, of his impending danger by Marguerite's frantic shrieks. The men had sprung to their feet, there was no need for further silence on their part; the very cliffs echoed the poor, heart-broken woman's screams.

Chauvelin, with a muttered oath, which boded no good to her who had dared to upset his most cherished plans, had hastily shouted the word of command—

"Into it, my men, and let no one escape from that hut alive!"

The moon had once more emerged from between the clouds: the darkness on the cliffs had gone, giving place once more to brilliant, silvery light. Some of the soldiers had rushed to the rough, wooden door of the hut, whilst one of them kept guard over Marguerite.

The door was partially open: one of the soldiers pushed it farther, but within all was darkness, the charcoal fire only lighting with a dim, red light the farthest corner of the hut. The soldiers paused automatically at the door, like machines, waiting for further orders.

Chauvelin, who was prepared for a violent onslaught from within, and for a vigorous resistance from the four fugitives under cover of the darkness, was for the moment paralysed with astonishment when he saw the soldiers there at attention, like sentries on guard, whilst not a sound proceeded from the hut.

Filled with strange, anxious forboding, he, too, went to the door of the hut, and peering into the gloom, he asked quickly—

"What is the meaning of this?"

"I think, citoyen, that there is no one there now," replied one of the soldiers imperturbably.

"You have not let those four men go?" thundered Chauvelin, menacingly. "I ordered you to let no man escape alive!—Quick, after them, all of you! Quick, in every direction!"

The men, obedient as machines, rushed down the rocky incline towards the beach, some going off to right and left, as fast as their feet could carry them.

"You and your men will pay with your lives for this blunder, citoyen sergeant," said Chauvelin viciously to the sergeant who had been in charge of the men; "and you too, citoyen," he added, turning with a snarl to Desgas, "for disobeying my orders."

"You ordered us to wait, citoyen, until the tall Englishman arrived and joined the four men in the hut. No one came," said the sergeant sullenly.

"But I ordered you just now, when the woman screamed, to rush in and let no one escape."

"But, citoyen, the four men who were there before had been gone some time, I think . . ."

"You think!—You? . . ." said Chauvelin, almost choking with fury, "and you let them go . . ."

"You ordered us to wait, citoyen," protested the sergeant, "and to implicitly obey your commands on pain of death. We waited."

"I heard the men creep out of the hut, not many minutes after we took cover, and long before the woman screamed," he added, as Chauvelin seemed still quite speechless with rage.

"Hark!" said Desgas suddenly.

In the distance the sound of repeated firing was heard. Chauvelin tried to peer along the beach below, but as luck would have it, the fitful moon once more hid her light behind a bank of clouds, and he could see nothing.

"One of you go into the hut and strike a light," he stammered at last.

Stolidly the sergeant obeyed: he went up to the charcoal fire and lit the small lantern he carried in his belt; it was evident that the hut was quite empty.

"Which way did they go?" asked Chauvelin.

"I could not tell, citoyen," said the sergeant; "they went straight down the cliff first, then disappeared behind some boulders."

"Hush! what was that?"

All three men listened attentively. In the far, very far distance, could be heard faintly echoing and already dying away, the quick, sharp splash of half a dozen oars. Chauvelin took out his handkerchief and wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"The schooner's boat!" was all he gasped.

Evidently Armand St. Just and his three companions had managed to creep along the side of the cliffs, whilst the men, like true soldiers of the well-drilled Republican army, had with blind obedience, and in fear of their lives, implicitly obeyed Chauvelin's orders—to wait for the tall Englishman, who was the important capture.

They had no doubt reached one of the creeks which jut far out to sea on this coast at intervals; behind this, the boat of the *Day Dream* must have been on the look-out for them; and they were by now safely on board the British schooner.

As if to confirm this last supposition, the dull boom of a gun was heard from out at sea.

"The schooner, citoyen," said Desgas, quietly; "she's off."

It needed all Chauvelin's nerve and presence of mind not to give way to a useless and undignified access of rage. There was no doubt now, that once again, that accursed British head had completely outwitted him. How he had contrived to reach the hut, without being seen by one of the thirty soldiers who guarded the spot, was more than Chauvelin could conceive. That he had done so before the thirty men had arrived on the cliff was, of course, fairly clear, but how had he come over in Reuben Goldstein's cart, all the way from Calais, without being sighted by the various patrols on duty, was impossible of explanation. It really seemed as if some potent Fate watched over that daring Scarlet Pimpernel, and his astute enemy almost felt a superstitious shudder pass through him as he looked round at the towering cliffs, and the loneliness of this outlying coast.

But surely this was reality! and the year of grace 1792: there were no fairies and hobgoblins about. Chauvelin and his thirty men had all heard with their own ears that accursed voice singing "God save the King," fully twenty minutes after they had all taken cover around the hut; by that time the four fugitives must have reached the creek, and got into the boat, and the nearest creek was more than a mile from the hut.

Where had that daring singer got to? Unless Satan himself had lent him wings he could not have covered that mile on a rocky cliff in the space of two minutes; and only two minutes had elapsed between his song and the sound of the boat's oars away at sea. He must have remained behind, and was even now hiding somewhere about the cliffs; the patrols were still about, he would still be sighted, no doubt. Chauvelin felt hopeful once again.

One or two of the men who had run after the fugitives, were now slowly working their way up the cliff: one of them reached Chauvelin's side at the very moment that this hope arose in the astute diplomatist's heart.

"We are too late, citoyen," the soldier said, "we reached the beach just before the moon was hidden by that bank of clouds. The boat had undoubtedly been on the look-out behind that first creek, a mile off, but she had shoved off some time ago, when we got to the beach, and was already some way out to sea. We fired after her, but of course, it was no good. She was making straight and quickly for the schooner. We saw her very clearly in the moonlight."

"Yes," said Chauvelin, with eager impatience, "she had shoved off some time ago, you said, and the nearest creek is a mile farther on."

"Yes, citoyen! I ran all the way, straight to the beach, though I guessed the boat would have waited somewhere near the creek, as the tide would reach there earliest. The boat must have shoved off some minutes before the woman began to scream."

Some minutes before the woman began to scream! Then Chauvelin's hopes had not deceived him. The Scarlet Pimpernel may have contrived to send the fugitives on ahead by the boat but he himself had not had time to reach it; he was still on shore, and all the roads were well patrolled. At any rate, all was not yet lost, and would not be, whilst that impudent Britisher was still on French soil.

"Bring the light in here!" he commanded eagerly, as he once more entered the hut.

The sergeant brought his lantern, and together the two men explored the little place: with a rapid glance Chauvelin noted its contents: the cauldron placed close under an aperture in the wall, and containing the last few embers of burned charcoal, a couple of stools, overturned as if in the haste of sudden departure, then the fisherman's tools and his nets lying in one corner, and beside them, something small and white.

"Pick that up," said Chauvelin to the sergeant, pointing to this white scrap, " and bring it to me."

It was a crumpled piece of paper, evidently forgotten there by the fugitives, in their hurry to get away. The sergeant, much awed by the citoyen's obvious rage and impatience, picked the paper up and handed it respectfully to Chauvelin.

"Read it, sergeant," said the latter curtly.

"It is almost illegible, citoyen . . . a fearful scrawl . . ."

"I ordered you to read it," repeated Chauvelin viciously.

The sergeant, by the light of his lantern, began deciphering the few hastily scrawled words.

"I cannot quite reach you, without risking your lives and endangering the success of your rescue. When you receive this wait two minutes then creep out of the hut one by one, turn to your left sharply, and creep cautiously down the cliff; keep to the left all the time, till you reach the first rock which you see jutting far out to sea—behind it in the creek the boat is on the look-out for you—give a long, sharp whistle—she will come up—get into her—my men will row you to the schooner, and thence to England and safety—once on board the *Day Dream* send the boat back for me, tell my men that I shall be at the creek which is in a direct line opposite the *Chat Gris* near Calais. They know it. I shall be there as soon as possible—they must wait for me at a safe distance out at sea, till they hear the usual signal. Do not delay—and obey these instructions implicitly."

"Then there is the signature, citoyen," added the sergeant, as he handed the paper back to Chauvelin.

But the latter had not waited an instant. One phrase of the momentous scrawl had caught his ear. "I shall be at the creek which is in a direct line apposite the *Chat Gris* near Calais": that phrase might yet mean victory for him.

"Which of you knows this coast well?" he shouted to his men who now one by one had all returned from their fruitless run, and were all assembled once more round the hut.

"I do, citoyen," said one of them. "I was born in Calais, and know every stone of these cliffs."

"There is a creek in a direct line from the *Chat Gris?*"

"There is, citoyen. I know it well."

"The Englishman is hoping to reach that creek. He does *not* know every stone of these cliffs, he may go there by the longest way round, and in any case he will proceed cautiously for fear of the patrols. At any rate, there is a chance to get him yet. A thousand francs to each man who gets to that creek before that long-legged Englishman."

"I know a short cut across the cliffs," said the soldier, and with an enthusiastic shout he rushed forward, followed closely by his comrades.

Within a few minutes their running footsteps had died away in the distance. Chauvelin listened to them for a moment; the promise of the reward was lending spurs to the soldiers of the Republic. The gleam of hate and anticipated triumph was once more apparent on his face.

Close to him Desgas still stood mute and impassive, waiting for further orders, whilst two soldiers were kneeling beside the prostrate form of Marguerite.

Chauvelin gave his secretary a vicious look. His well-laid plan had failed, its sequel was problematical; there was still a great chance now that the Scarlet Pimpernel might yet escape, and Chauvelin, with that unreasoning fury which sometimes assails a strong nature, was longing to vent his rage on somebody.

The soldiers were holding Marguerite pinioned to the ground, though she, poor soul, was not making the faintest struggle. Overwrought nature had at last peremtorily asserted herself, and she lay there in a dead swoon: her eyes circled by deep purple lines, that told of long, sleepless nights, her hair matted and damp round her forehead, her lips parted in a sharp curve that spoke of physical pain.

The cleverest woman in Europe, the elegant and fashionable Lady Blakeney, who had dazzled London society with her beauty, her wit and her extravagances, presented a very pathetic picture of tired-out, suffering womanhood, which would have appealed to any but the hard, vengeful heart of her baffled enemy.

"It is no use mounting guard over a woman who is half dead," he said spitefully to the soldiers, "when you have allowed five men who were very much alive to escape."

Obediently the soldiers rose to their feet.

"You'd better try and find that foot-path again for me, and that broken-down cart we left on the road."

Then suddenly a bright idea seemed to strike him.

"Ah! by the by! where is the Jew?"

"Close by here, citoyen," said Desgas; "I gagged him and tied his legs together as you commanded."

From the immediate vicinity, a plaintive moan reached Chauvelin's ears. He followed his secretary, who led the way to the other side of the hut, where, fallen into an absolute heap of dejection, with his legs tightly pinioned together and his mouth gagged, lay the unfortunate descendant of Israel.

His face in the silvery light of the moon looked positively ghastly with terror: his eyes were wide open and almost glassy, and his whole body was trembling, as if with ague, while a piteous wail escaped his bloodless lips. The rope which had originally been wound round his shoulders and arms had evidently given way, for it lay in a tangle about his body, but he seemed quite unconscious of this, for he had not made the slightest attempt to move from the place where Desgas had originally put him: like a terrified chicken which looks upon a line of white chalk, drawn on a table, or on a string which paralyses its movements.

"Bring the cowardly brute here," commanded Chauvelin.

He certainly felt exceedingly vicious, and since he had no reasonable grounds for venting his ill-humour on the soldiers who had but too punctually obeyed his orders, he felt that the son of the despised race would prove an excellent butt. With true French contempt for the Jew, which has survived the lapse of centuries even to this day, he would not go too near him, but said with biting sarcasm, as the wretched old man was brought in full light of the moon by the two soldiers—

"I suppose now, that being a Jew, you have a good memory for bargains?"

"Answer!" he again commanded, as the Jew with trembling lips seemed too frightened to speak.

"Yes, your Honour," stammered the poor wretch.

"You remember, then, the one you and I made together in Calais, when you undertook to overtake

Reuben Goldstein, his nag and my friend the tall stranger? Eh?"

"B . . . b . . . but . . . your Honour . . ."

"There is no 'but.' I said, do you remember?"

"Y . . . y . . . y . . . yes . . . your Honour!"

"What was the bargain?"

There was dead silence. The unfortunate man looked round at the great cliffs, the moon above, the stolid faces of the soldiers, and even at the poor, prostrate, inanimate woman close by, but said nothing.

"Will you speak?" thundered Chauvelin menacingly.

He did try, poor wretch, but, obviously, he could not. There was no doubt, however, that he knew what to expect from the stern man before him.

"Your Honour . . ." he ventured imploringly.

"Since your terror seems to have paralysed your tongue," said Chauvelin sarcastically, "I must needs refresh your memory. It was agreed between us that if we overtook my friend the tall stranger, before he reached this place, you were to have ten pieces of gold."

A low moan escaped from the Jew's trembling lips.

"But," added Chauvelin, with slow emphasis, "if you deceived me in your promise, you were to have a sound beating, one that would teach you not to tell lies."

"I did not, your Honour; I swear it by Abraham . . ."

"And by all the other patriarchs, I know. Unfortunately, they are still in Hades, I believe, according to your creed, and cannot help you much in your present trouble. Now, you did not fulfil your share of the bargain, but I am ready to fulfil mine. Here," he added, turning to the soldiers, "the buckle-end of your two belts to this confounded Jew."

As the soldiers obediently unbuckled their heavy leather belts, the Jew set up a howl that surely would have been enough to bring all the patriarchs out of Hades and elsewhere, to defend their descendant from the brutality of this French official.

"I think I can rely on you, citoyen soldiers," laughed Chauvelin maliciously, "to give this old liar the best and soundest beating he has ever experienced. But don't kill him," he added drily.

"We will obey, citoyen," replied the soldiers as imperturbably as ever.

He did not wait to see his orders carried out: he knew that he could trust these soldiers—who were still smarting under his rebuke—not to mince matters, when given a free hand to belabour a third party.

"When that lumbering coward has had his punishment," he said to Desgas, "the men can guide us as far as the cart, and one of them can drive us in it back to Calais. The Jew and the woman can look after each other," he added roughly, "until we can send somebody for them in the morning. They can't run away very far, in their present condition, and we cannot be troubled with them just now."

Chauvelin had not given up all hope. His men, he knew, was spurred on by the hope of the reward. That enigmatic and audacious Scarlet Pimpernel, alone and with thirty men at his heels, could not reasonably be expected to escape a second time.

But he felt less sure now: the Englishman's audacity had baffled him once, whilst the wooden-headed stupidity of the soldiers, and the interference of a woman had turned his hand, which held all the trumps, into a losing one. If Marguerite had not taken up his time, if the soldiers had had a grain of intelligence, if . . . it was a long "if," and Chauvelin stood for a moment quite still, and enrolled thirty odd people in one long, overwhelming anathema. Nature, poetic, silent, balmy, the bright moon, the calm, silvery sea spoke of beauty and of rest, and Chauvelin cursed nature, cursed man and woman, and, above all, he cursed all long-legged, meddlesome British enigmas with one gigantic curse.

The howls of the Jew behind him, undergoing his punishment, sent a balm through his heart, overburdened as it was with revengeful malice. He smiled. It eased his mind to think that some human being at least was, like himself, not altogether at peace with mankind.

He turned and took a last look at the lonely bit of coast, where stood the wooden hut, now bathed in moonlight, the scene of the greatest discomfiture ever experienced by a leading member of the Committee of Public Safety.

Against a rock, on a hard bed of stone, lay the unconscious figure of Marguerite Blakeney, while some few paces farther on, the unfortunate Jew was receiving on his broad back the blows of two stout leather belts, wielded by the stolid arms of two sturdy soldiers of the Republic. The howls of Benjamin Rosenbaum were fit to make the dead rise from their graves. They must have wakened all the gulls from sleep, and made them look down with great interest at the doings of the lords of the creation.

"That will do," commanded Chauvelin, as the Jew's moans became more feeble, and the poor wretch seemed to have fainted away, "we don't want to kill him."

Obediently the soldiers buckled on their belts, one of them viciously kicking the Jew to one side.

"Leave him there," said Chauvelin, "and lead the way now quickly to the cart. I'll follow."

He walked up to where Marguerite lay, and looked down into her face. She had evidently recovered consciousness, and was making feeble efforts to raise herself. Her large, blue eyes were looking at the moonlit scene round her with a scared and terrified look; they rested with a mixture of horror and pity on the Jew, whose luckless fate and wild howls had been the first signs that struck her, with her returning senses; then she caught sight of Chauvelin in his neat, dark clothes, which seemed hardly crumpled after the stirring events of the last few hours. He was smiling sarcastically, and his pale eyes peered down at her with a look of intense malice.

With mock gallantry, he stooped and raised her icy-cold hand to his lips, which sent a thrill of indescribable loathing through Marguerite's weary frame.

"I much regret, fair lady," he said in his most suave tones, "that circumstances, over which I have no control, compel me to leave you here for the moment. But I go away, secure in the knowledge that I do not leave you unprotected. Our friend Benjamin here, though a trifle the worse for wear at the present moment, will prove a gallant defender of your fair person, I have no doubt. At dawn I will send an escort for you; until then, I feel sure that you will find him devoted, though perhaps a trifle slow."

Marguerite only had the strength to turn her head away. Her heart was broken with cruel anguish. One awful thought had returned to her mind, together with gathering consciousness: "What had become of Percy?—What of Armand?"

She knew nothing of what had happened, after she heard the cheerful song, "God save the King," which she believed to be the signal of death.

"I myself," concluded Chauvelin, "must now very reluctantly leave you. Au revoir, fair lady. We meet, I hope, soon in London. Shall I see you at the Prince of Wales' garden party?—No?—Ah, well, au revoir!—Remember me, I pray, to Sir Percy Blakeney."

And, with a last ironical smile and bow, he once more kissed her hand and disappeared down the footpath in the wake of the soldiers, and followed by the imperturbable Desgas.

31

THE ESCAPE

MARGUERITE listened—half dazed as she was—to the fast-retreating, firm footsteps of the four men.

All nature was so still that she, lying with her ear close to the ground, could distinctly trace the sound of their tread, as they ultimately turned into the road, and presently the faint echo of the old cart-wheels, the halting gait of the lean nag, told her that her enemy was a quarter of a league away. How long she lay there she knew not. She had lost count of time; dreamily she looked up at the moonlit sky, and listened to the monotonous roll of the waves.

The invigorating scent of the sea was nectar to her wearied body, the immensity of the lonely cliffs was silent and dreamlike. Her brain only remained conscious of its ceaseless, its intolerable torture of uncertainty.

She did not know!——

She did not know whether Percy was even now, at this moment, in the hands of the soldiers of the Republic, enduring—as she had done herself—the gibes and jeers of his malicious enemy. She did not know, on the other hand, whether Armand's lifeless body did not lie there, in the hut, whilst Percy had escaped, only to hear that his wife's hands had guided the human bloodhounds to the murder of Armand and his friends.

The physical pain of utter weariness was so great, that she hoped confidently her tired body could rest here for ever, after all the turmoil, the passion, and the intrigues of the last few days—here, beneath that clear sky, within sound of the sea, and with this balmy autumn breeze whispering to her a last lullaby. All was so solitary, so silent, like unto dreamland. Even the last faint echo of the distant cart had long ago died away, afar.

Suddenly . . . a sound . . . the strangest, undoubtedly, that these lonely cliffs of France had ever heard, broke the silent solemnity of the shore.

So strange a sound was it, that the gentle breeze ceased to murmur, the tiny pebbles to roll down the steep incline! So strange, that Marguerite, wearied, overwrought as she was, thought that the beneficial unconsciousness of the approach of death was playing her half-sleeping senses a weird and elusive trick.

It was the sound of a good, solid, absolutely British "Damn!"

The sea gulls in their nests awoke and looked round in astonishment; a distant and solitary owl set up a midnight hoot, the tall cliffs frowned down majestically at the strange, unheard-of sacrilege.

Marguerite did not trust her ears. Half-raising herself on her hands, she strained every sense to see or hear, to know the meaning of this very earthly sound.

All was still again for the space of a few seconds; the same silence once more fell upon the great and lonely vastness.

Then Marguerite, who had listened as in a trance, who felt she must be dreaming with that cool, magnetic moonlight overhead, heard again; and this time her heart stood still, her eyes large and dilated, looked round her, not daring to trust to her other sense.

"Odd's life! but I wish those demmed fellows had not hit quite so hard!"

This time it was quite unmistakable, only one particular pair of essentially British lips could have uttered those words, in sleepy, drawly, affected tones.

"Damn!" repeated those same British lips emphatically. "Zounds! but I'm as weak as a rat!"

In a moment Marguerite was on her feet.

Was she dreaming? Were those great, stony cliffs the gates of paradise? Was the fragrant breath of the breeze suddenly caused by the flutter of angels' wings, bringing tidings of unearthly joys to her, after all her sufferings, or—faint and ill—was she the prey of delirium?

She listened again, and once again she heard the same very earthly sounds of good, honest British language, not the least akin to whisperings from paradise or flutter of angels' wings.

She looked round her eagerly at the tall cliffs, the lonely hut, the great stretch of rocky beach. Somewhere there above or below her, behind a boulder or inside a crevice, but still hidden from her longing, feverish eyes, must be the owner of that voice, which once used to irritate her, but which now would make her the happiest woman in Europe, if only she could locate it.

"Percy! Percy!" she shrieked hysterically, tortured between doubt and hope, "I am here! Come to me! Where are you? Percy! Percy! . . ."

"It's all very well calling me, m'dear!" said the same sleepy, drawly voice, "but odd's my life, I cannot come to you: those demmed frog-eaters have trussed me like a goose on a spit, and I am as weak as a mouse . . . I cannot get away."

And still Marguerite did not understand. She did not realize for at least another ten seconds whence came that voice, so drawly, so dear, but alas! with a strange accent of weakness and of suffering. There was no one within sight . . . except by that rock . . . Great God! . . . the Jew! . . . Was she mad or dreaming? . . .

His back was against the pale moonlight, he was half-crouching, trying vainly to raise himself with his arms tightly pinioned. Marguerite ran up to him, took his head in both her hands . . . and looked straight into a pair of blue eyes, good-natured, even a trifle amused—shining out of the weird and distorted mask of the Jew.

"Percy! . . . Percy! . . . my husband!" she gasped, faint with the fullness of her joy. "Thank God! Thank God!"

"La! m'dear," he rejoined good-humouredly, "we will both do that anon, an you think you can loosen these demmed ropes, and release me from my inelegant attitude."

She had no knife, her fingers were numb and weak, but she worked away with her teeth, while great welcome tears poured from her eyes on to those poor, pinioned hands.

"Odd's life!" he said, when at last, after frantic efforts on her part, the ropes seemed at last to be giving way, "but I marvel whether it has ever happened before that an English gentleman allowed himself to be licked by a demmed foreigner, and made no attempt to give as good as he got."

It was very obvious that he was exhausted from sheer physical pain, and when at last the rope gave way, he fell in a heap against the rock.

Marguerite looked helplessly round her.

"Oh! for a drop of water on this awful beach!" she cried in agony, seeing that he was ready to faint again.

"Nay, m'dear," he murmured with his good-humoured smile, "personally I should prefer a drop of good French brandy! an you'll dive in the pocket of this dirty old garment, you'll find my flask. . . . I am demmed if I can move."

When he had drunk some brandy, he forced Marguerite to do likewise.

"La! that's better now! Eh! little woman!" he said with a sigh of satisfaction. "Heigh-ho! but this is a queer rig-up for Sir Percy Blakeney, Bart., to be found in by his lady, and no mistake. Begad!" he added, passing his hand over his chin, "I haven't been shaved for nearly twenty hours: I must look a disgusting object. As for these curls . . ."

And laughingly he took off the disfiguring wig and curls, and stretched out his long limbs, which were cramped from many hours' stooping. Then he bent forward and looked long and searchingly into his wife's blue eyes.

"Percy," she whispered, while a deep blush suffused her delicate cheeks and neck, "if you only knew . . ."

"I do know, dear . . . everything," he said with infinite gentleness.

"And can you ever forgive?"

"I have naught to forgive, sweetheart; your heroism, your devotion, which I, alas! so little deserved, have more than atoned for that unfortunate episode at the ball."

"Then you knew? . . ." she whispered, "all the time . . ."

"Yes!" he replied tenderly, "I knew . . . all the time. . . . But begad! had I but known what a noble heart yours was, my Margot, I should have trusted you, as you deserved to be trusted, and you would not have had to undergo the terrible sufferings of the past few hours, in order to run after a husband, who has done so much that needs forgiveness."

They were sitting side by side, leaning up against a rock, and he had rested his aching head on her shoulder. She certainly now deserved the name of "the happiest woman in Europe."

"It is a case of the blind leading the lame, sweetheart, is it not?" he said with his good-natured smile of old. "Odds life! but I do not know which are the more sore, my shoulders or your little feet."

He bent forward to kiss them, for they peeped out through her torn stockings, and bore pathetic witness to her endurance and devotion.

"But Armand . . ." she said, with sudden terror and remorse, as in the midst of her happiness the image of the beloved brother, for whose sake she had so deeply sinned, rose now before her mind.

"Oh! have no fear for Armand, sweetheart," he said tenderly, "did I not pledge you my word that he should be safe? He with de Tournay and the others are even now on board the *Day Dream*."

"But how?" she gasped, "I do not understand."

"Yet, 'tis simple enough, m'dear," he said with that funny, half-shy, half-inane laugh of his, "you see! when I found that that brute Chauvelin meant to stick to me like a leech, I thought the best thing I could do, as I could not shake him off, was to take him along with me. I had to get to Armand and the others somehow, and all the roads were patrolled, and every one on the look-out for your humble servant. I knew that when I slipped through Chauvelin's fingers at the *Chat Gris* that he would lie in wait for me here, whichever way I took. I wanted to keep an eye on him and his doings, and a British head is as good as a French one any day."

Indeed it had proved to be infinitely better, and Marguerite's heart was filled with joy and marvel, as he continued to recount to her the daring manner in which he had snatched the fugitives away, right from under Chauvelin's very nose.

"Dressed as the dirty old Jew," he said gaily, "I knew I should not be recognized. I had met Reuben Goldstein in Calais earlier in the evening. For a few gold-pieces he supplied me with this rig-out, and undertook to bury himself out of sight of everybody, whilst he lent me his cart and nag."

"But if Chauvelin had discovered you," she gasped excitedly, "your disguise was good . . . but he is so sharp."

"Odd's fish!" he rejoined quietly, "then certainly the game would have been up. I could but take the risk. I know human nature pretty well by now," he added, with a note of sadness in his cheery, young voice, "and I know these Frenchmen out and out. They so loathe a Jew, that they never come nearer than a couple of yards of him, and begad! I fancy that I contrived to make myself look about as loathsome an object as it is possible to conceive."

"Yes!—and then?" she asked eagerly.

"Zooks!—then I carried out my little plan: that is to say, at first I only determined to leave everything to chance, but when I heard Chauvelin giving his orders to the soldiers, I thought that Fate and I were going to work together after all. I reckoned on the blind obedience of the soldiers. Chauvelin had ordered them on pain of death, not to stir until the tall Englishman came. Desgas had thrown me down in a heap quite close to the hut; the soldiers took no notice of the Jew who had driven Citoyen Chauvelin to this spot. I managed to free my hands from the ropes, with which the brute had trussed me; I always carry pencil and paper with me wherever I go, and hastily scrawled a few important instructions on a scrap of paper; then I looked about me. I crawled up to the hut, under the very noses of the soldiers, who lay under cover without stirring, just as Chauvelin had ordered them to do, then I dropped my little note into the hut, through a chink in the wall, and waited. In this note I told the fugitives to walk noiselessly out of the hut, creep down the cliffs, keep to the left until they came to the first creek, to give a certain signal, when the boat of the *Day Dream*, which lay in wait not far out to sea, would pick them up. They obeyed implicitly, fortunately for them and for me. The soldiers who saw them were equally obedient to Chauvelin's orders. They did not stir! I waited for nearly half an hour; when I knew that the fugitives were safe I gave the signal, which caused so much stir."

And that was the whole story. It seemed so simple, and Marguerite could but marvel at the wonderful ingenuity, the boundless pluck and audacity which had evolved and helped to carry out this daring plan.

"But those brutes struck you!" she gasped in horror, at the bare recollection of the fearful indignity.

"Well! that could not be helped," he said gently, "whilst my little wife's fate was so uncertain, I had to remain here, by her side. Odd's life!" he added merrily, "never fear! Chauvelin will lose nothing by waiting, I warrant! Wait till I get him back to England!—La! he shall pay for the thrashing he gave me with compound interest, I promise you."

Marguerite laughed. It was so good to be beside him, to hear his cheery voice, to watch that good-humoured twinkle in his blue eyes, as he stretched out his strong arms, in longing for that foe, and anticipation, of his well-deserved punishment.

Suddenly, however, she started: the happy blush left her cheek, the light of joy died out of her eyes: she had heard a stealthy footfall overhead, and a stone had rolled down from the top of the cliffs right down to the beach below.

"What's that?" she whispered in horror and alarm.

"Oh! nothing, m'dear," he muttered with a pleasant laugh, "only a trifle you happened to have forgotten . . . my friend, Ffoulkes . . ."

"Sir Andrew!" she gasped.

Indeed, she had wholly forgotten the devoted friend and companion, who had trusted and stood by her during all these hours of anxiety and suffering. She remembered him now, tardily and with a pang of remorse.

"Aye! you had forgotten him, hadn't you, m'dear," said Sir Percy, merrily; "fortunately, I met him, not far from the *Chat Gris*, before I had that interesting supper party with my friend Chauvelin. . . . Odd's life, but I have a score to settle with that young reprobate!—but in the meanwhile, I told him of a very long, very roundabout road, that would bring him here by a very circuitous road which Chauvelin's men would never suspect, just about the time when we are ready for him, eh, little woman?"

"And he obeyed?" asked Marguerite, in utter astonishment.

"Without word or question. See, here he comes. He was not in the way when I did not want him, and now he arrives in the nick of time. Ah! he will make pretty little Suzanne a most admirable and methodical husband."

In the meanwhile Sir Andrew Ffoulkes had cautiously worked his way down the cliffs: he stopped once or twice, pausing to listen for the whispered words which would guide him to Blakeney's hiding-place.

"Blakeney!" he ventured to say at last cautiously, "Blakeney! are you there?"

The next moment he rounded the rock against which Sir Percy and Marguerite were leaning, and seeing the weird figure clad in the long Jew's gaberdine, he paused in sudden, complete bewilderment.

But already Blakeney had struggled to his feet.

"Here I am, friend," he said with his funny, inane laugh. "All alive! though I do look a begad scarecrow in these demmed things."

"Zooks!" ejaculated Sir Andrew in boundless astonishment as he recognized his leader, "of all the . . ."

The young man had seen Marguerite, and happily checked the forcible language that rose to his lips, at sight of the exquisite Sir Percy in this weird and dirty garb.

"Yes!" said Blakeney, calmly, "of all the . . . hem! . . . My friend!—I have not yet had time to ask you what you were doing in France, when I ordered you to remain in London? Insubordination? What?

Wait till my shoulders are less sore, and, by Gad, see the punishment you'll get."

"Odd's fish! I'll bear it," said Sir Andrew, with a merry laugh, "seeing that you are alive to give it. . . . Would you have had me allow Lady Blakeney to do the journey alone? But, in the name of heaven, man, where did you get these extraordinary clothes?"

"Lud! they are a bit quaint, ain't they?" laughed Sir Percy, jovially. "But, odd's fish!" he added, with sudden earnestness and authority, "now you are here, Ffoulkes, we must lose no more time: that brute Chauvelin may send some one to look after us."

Marguerite was so happy, she could have stayed here for ever, hearing his voice, asking a hundred questions. But at mention of Chauvelin's name she started in quick alarm, afraid for the dear life she would have died to save.

"But how can we get back!" she gasped; "the roads are full of soldiers between here and Calais and . . ."

"We are not going back to Calais, sweetheart," he said, "but just the other side of Gris Nez, not half a league from here. The boat of the *Day Dream* will meet us there."

"The boat of the *Day Dream*?"

"Yes!" he said, with a merry laugh; "another little trick of mine. I should have told you before that when I slipped that note into the hut, I also added another for Armand, which I directed him to leave behind, and which has sent Chauvelin and his men running full tilt back to the *Chat Gris*, after me; but the first little note contained my real instructions, including those to old Briggs. He had my orders to go out further to sea, and then towards the west. When well out of sight of Calais he will send the galley to a little creek he and I know of just beyond Gris Nez. The men will look out for me—we have a preconcerted signal, and we will all be safely aboard, whilst Chauvelin and his men solemnly sit and watch the creek which is 'just opposite the *Chat Gris*.' "

"The other side of Gris Nez? But I . . . I cannot walk, Percy," she moaned helplessly as, trying to struggle to her tired feet, she found herself unable even to stand.

"I will carry you, dear," he said simply; "the blind leading the lame, you know."

Sir Andrew was ready, too, to help with the precious burden, but Sir Percy would not entrust his beloved to any arms but his own.

"When you and she are both safely on board the *Day Dream*," he said to his young comrade, "and I feel that Mlle. Suzanne's eyes will not greet me in England with reproachful looks, then it will be my turn to rest."

And his arms, still vigorous in spite of fatigue and suffering, closed round Marguerite's poor, weary body, and lifted her as gently as if she had been a feather.

Then, as Sir Andrew discreetly kept out of earshot, there were many things said—or rather whispered—which even the autumn breeze did not catch, for it had gone to rest.

All his fatigue was forgotten; his shoulders must have been very sore, for the soldiers had hit hard, but the man's muscles seemed made of steel, and his energy was almost supernatural. It was a weary tramp, half a league along the stony side of the cliffs, but never for a moment did his courage give way or his muscles yield to fatigue. On he tramped, with firm footstep, his vigorous arms encircling the precious burden, and . . . no doubt, as she lay, quiet and happy, at times lulled to momentary drowsiness, at others watching, through the slowly gathering morning light, the pleasant face with the lazy, drooping blue eyes, ever cheerful, ever illumined with a good-humoured smile, she whispered many things, which helped to shorten the weary road, and acted as a soothing balsam to his aching sinews.

The many-hued light of dawn was breaking in the east, when at last they reached the creek beyond Gris Nez. The galley lay in wait: in answer to a signal from Sir Percy she drew near, and two sturdy British sailors had the honour of carrying my lady into the boat.

Half an hour later, they were on board the *Day Dream*. The crew, who of necessity were in their master's secrets, and who were devoted to him heart and soul, were not surprised to see him arriving in so extraordinary a disguise.

Armand St. Just and the other fugitives were eagerly awaiting the advent of their brave rescuer; he would not stay to hear the expressions of their gratitude, but found his way to his private cabin as quickly as he could, leaving Marguerite quite happy in the arms of her brother.

Everything on board the *Day Dream* was fitted with that exquisite luxury, so dear to Sir Percy Blakeney's heart, and by the time they all landed at Dover he had found time to get into some of the sumptuous clothes which he loved, and of which he always kept a supply on board his yacht.

The difficulty was to provide Marguerite with a pair of shoes, and great was the little middy's joy when my lady found that she could put foot on English shore in his best pair.

The rest is silence!—silence and joy for those who had endured so much suffering, yet found at last a great and lasting happiness.

But it is on record that at the brilliant wedding of Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, Bart., with Mlle. Suzanne de Tournay de Basserive, a function at which H.R.H. the Prince of Wales and all the *élite* of fashionable society were present, the most beautiful woman there was unquestionably Lady Blakeney, whilst the clothes Sir Percy Blakeney wore were the talk of the *jeunesse dorée* of London for many days.

It is also a fact that M. Chauvelin, the accredited agent of the French Republican Government, was not present at that or any other social function in London, after that memorable evening at Lord Grenville's ball.

SECOND NOVEL

"THOSE FRENCHIES SEEK HIM EVERYWHERE"

PROLOGUE

I

PARIS: 1783

"COWARD! Coward! Coward!"

The words rang out, clear, strident, passionate, in a crescendo of agonized humiliation.

The boy, quivering with rage, had sprung to his feet, and, losing his balance, he fell forward clutching at the table, whilst with a convulsive movement of the lids, he tried in vain to suppress the tears of shame which were blinding him.

"Coward!" He tried to shout the insult so that all might hear, but his parched throat refused him service, his trembling hands sought the scattered cards upon the table, he collected them together, quickly, nervously, fingering them with feverish energy, then he hurled them at the man opposite, whilst with a final effort he still contrived to mutter: "Coward!"

The older men tried to interpose, but the young ones only laughed, quite prepared for the adventure which must inevitably ensue, the only possible ending to a quarrel such as this.

Conciliation or arbitration was out of the question. Déroulède should have known better than to speak disrespectfully of Adèle de Montchéri, when the little Vicomte de Marny's infatuation for the notorious beauty had been the talk of Paris and Versailles these many months past.

Adèle was very lovely and a veritable tower of greed and egotism. The Marnys were rich and the little

Vicomte very young, and just now the brightly-plumaged hawk was busy plucking the latest pigeon, newly arrived from its ancestral cote.

The boy was still in the initial stage of his infatuation. To him Adèle was a paragon of all the virtues, and he would have done battle on her behalf against the entire aristocracy of France, in a vain endeavour to justify his own exalted opinion of one of the most dissolute women of the epoch. He was a first-rate swordsman too, and his friends had already learned that it was best to avoid all allusions to Adèle's beauty and weaknesses.

But Déroulède was a noted blunderer. He was little versed in the manners and tones of that high society in which, somehow, he still seemed an intruder. But for his great wealth, no doubt, he never would have been admitted within the intimate circle of aristocratic France. His ancestry was somewhat doubtful and his coat-of-arms unadorned with quarterings.

But little was known of his family or the origin of its wealth; it was only known that his father had suddenly become the late King's dearest friend, and commonly surmised that Déroulède gold had on more than one occasion filled the emptied coffers of the First Gentleman of France.

Déroulède had not sought the present quarrel. He had merely blundered in that clumsy way of his, which was no doubt a part of the inheritance bequeathed to him by his bourgeois ancestry.

He knew nothing of the little Vicomte's private affairs, still less of his relationship with Adèle, but he knew enough of the world and enough of Paris to be acquainted with the lady's reputation. He hated at all times to speak of women. He was not what in those days would be termed a ladies' man, and was even somewhat unpopular with the sex. But in this instance the conversation had drifted in that direction, and when Adèle's name was mentioned, every one became silent, save the little Vicomte, who waxed enthusiastic.

A shrug of the shoulders on Déroulède's part had aroused the boy's ire, then a few casual words, and without further warning, the insult had been hurled and the cards thrown in the older man's face.

Déroulède did not move from his seat. He sat erect and placid, one knee crossed over the other, his serious, rather swarthy face perhaps a shade paler than usual: otherwise it seemed as if the insult had never reached his ears, or the cards struck his cheek.

He had perceived his blunder, just twenty seconds too late. Now he was sorry for the boy and angered with himself, but it was too late to draw back. To avoid a conflict he would at this moment have sacrificed half his fortune, but not one particle of his dignity.

He knew and respected the old Duc de Marny, a feeble old man now, almost a dotard, whose hitherto spotless blazon the young Vicomte, his son, was doing his best to besmirch.

When the boy fell forward, blind and drunk with rage, Déroulède leant towards him automatically, quite kindly, and helped him to his feet. He would have asked the lad's pardon for his own thoughtlessness, had that been possible: but the stilted code of so-called honour forbade so logical a proceeding. It would have done no good, and could but imperil his own reputation without averting the traditional sequel.

The panelled walls of the celebrated gaming saloon had often witnessed scenes such as this. All those present acted by routine. The etiquette of duelling prescribed certain formalities, and these were strictly but rapidly adhered to.

The young Vicomte was quickly surrounded by a close circle of friends. His great name, his wealth, his father's influence, had opened for him every door in Versailles and Paris. At this moment he might have had an army of seconds to support him in the coming conflict.

Déroulède for a while was left alone near the card-table, where the unsnuffed candles began smouldering in their sockets. He had risen to his feet, somewhat bewildered at the rapid turn of events. His dark, restless eyes wandered for a moment round the room, as if in quick search for a friend.

But where the Vicomte was at home by right, Déroulède had only been admitted by reason of his wealth. His acquaintances and sycophants were many, but his friends very few.

For the first time this fact was brought home to him. Every one in the room must have known and realized that he had not wilfully sought this quarrel, that throughout he had borne himself as any gentleman would, yet now, when the issue was so close at hand, no one came forward to stand by him.

"For form's sake, monsieur, will you choose your seconds?"

It was the young Marquis de Villefranche who spoke, a little haughtily, with a certain ironical condescension towards the rich parvenu, who was about to have the honour of crossing swords with one of the noblest gentlemen in France.

"I pray you, Monsieur le Marquis," rejoined Déroulède coldly, "to make the choice for me. You see, I have few friends in Paris."

The Marquis bowed, and gracefully flourished his lace handkerchief. He was accustomed to being appealed to in all matters pertaining to etiquette, to the toilet, to the latest cut in coats, and the procedure in duels. Good-natured, foppish and idle, he felt quite happy and in his element thus to be made chief organizer of the tragic farce about to be enacted on the parquet floor of the gaming saloon.

He looked about the room for a while, scrutinizing the faces of those around him. The gilded youth was crowding round De Marny; a few older men stood in a group at the farther end of the room: to these the Marquis turned, and addressing one of them, an elderly man with a military bearing and a shabby brown coat:

"Mon Colonel," he said, with another flourishing bow; "I am deputed by M. Déroulède to provide him with seconds for this affair of honour, may I call upon you to——"

"Certainly, certainly," replied the Colonel. "I am not intimately acquainted with M. Déroulède, but since you stand sponsor, M. le Marquis——"

"Oh!" rejoined the Marquis, lightly, "a mere matter of form, you know. M. Déroulède belongs to the entourage of Her Majesty. He is a man of honour. But I am not his sponsor. Marny is my friend, and if you prefer not to——"

"Indeed I am entirely at M. Déroulède's service," said the Colonel, who had thrown a quick, scrutinizing glance at the isolated figure near the card-table, "if he will accept my services——"

"He will be very glad to accept, my dear Colonel," whispered the Marquis, with an ironical twist of his aristocratic lips. "He has no friends in our set, and if you and De Quettare will honour him, I think he should be grateful."

M. de Quettare, adjutant to M. le Colonel, was ready to follow in the footsteps of his chief, and the two men, after the prescribed salutations to M. le Marquis de Villefranche went across to speak to Déroulède.

"If you will accept our services, monsieur," began the Colonel abruptly, "mine and my adjutant's, M. de Quettare, we place ourselves entirely at your disposal."

"I thank you, messieurs," rejoined Déroulède. "The whole thing is a farce, and that young man is a fool; but I have been in the wrong and——"

"You would wish to apologize?" queried the Colonel icily.

The worthy soldier had heard something of Déroulède's reputed bourgeois ancestry. This suggestion of an apology was no doubt in accordance with the customs of the middle-classes, but the Colonel literally gasped at the unworthiness of the proceeding. An apology? Bah! Disgusting! cowardly! beneath the dignity of any gentleman, however wrong he might be. How could two soldiers of His Majesty's army identify themselves with such doings?

But Déroulède seemed unconscious of the enormity of his suggestion.

"If I could avoid a conflict," he said, "I would tell the Vicomte that I had no knowledge of his admiration for the lady we were discussing and——"

"Are you so very much afraid of getting a sword-scratch, monsieur?" interrupted the Colonel impatiently, whilst M. de Quettare elevated a pair of aristocratic eyebrows in bewilderment at such an extraordinary display of bourgeois cowardice.

"You mean, Monsieur le Colonel——?" queried Déroulède.

"That you must either fight the Vicomte de Marny to-night, or clear out of Paris to-morrow. Your position in our set would become untenable," retorted the Colonel, not unkindly, for in spite of Déroulède's extraordinary attitude, there was nothing in his bearing or his appearance that suggested cowardice or fear.

"I bow to your superior knowledge of your friends, M. le Colonel," responded Déroulède, as he silently drew his sword from its sheath.

The centre of the saloon was quickly cleared. The seconds measured the length of the swords and then stood behind the antagonists, slightly in advance of the groups of spectators, who stood massed all round the room.

They represented the flower of what France had of the best and noblest in name, in lineage, in chivalry, in that year of grace 1783. The storm-cloud which a few years hence was destined to break over their heads, sweeping them from their palaces to the prison and the guillotine, was only gathering very slowly, in the dim horizon of squalid, starving Paris: for the next half-dozen years they would still dance and gamble, fight and flirt, surround a tottering throne, and hoodwink a weak monarch. The Fates' avenging sword still rested in its sheath; the relentless, ceaseless wheel still bore them up in their whirl of pleasure; the downward movement had only just begun: the cry of the oppressed children of France had not yet been heard above the din of dance music and lovers' serenades.

The young Duc de Châteaudun was there, he who, nine years later, went to the guillotine on that cold September morning, his hair dressed in the latest fashion, the finest Mechlin lace around his wrists, playing a final game of piquet with his younger brother, as the tumbril bore them along through the hooting, yelling crowd of the half-naked starvelings of Paris.

There was the Vicomte de Mirepoix, who, a few years later, standing on the platform of the guillotine, laid a bet with M. de Miranges that his own blood would flow bluer than that of any other head cut off that day in France. Citizen Samson heard the bet made, and when De Mirepoix's head fell into the basket, the headsman lifted it up for M. de Miranges to see. The latter laughed.

"Mirepoix was always a braggart," he said lightly as he laid his head upon the block. "Who'll take my bet that my blood turns out to be bluer than his?"

But of all these comedies, these tragico-farces of later years, none who were present on that night, when the Vicomte de Marny fought Paul Déroulède, had as yet any presentiment.

They watched the two men fighting, with the same casual interest, at first, which they would have bestowed on the dancing of a new movement in the minuet.

De Marny came of a race that had wielded the sword for many centuries, but he was hot, excited, not a little addled with wine and rage. Déroulède was lucky; he would come out of the affair with a slight scratch.

A good swordsman too, that wealthy parvenu. It was interesting to watch his sword-play: very quiet at first, no feint or parry, scarcely a riposte, only *en garde*, always *en garde* very carefully, steadily, ready for his antagonist at every turn and in every circumstance.

Gradually the circle round the combatants narrowed. A few discreet exclamations of admiration greeted Déroulède's most successful parry. De Marny was getting more and more excited, the older man more and more sober and reserved.

A thoughtless lunge placed the little Vicomte at his opponent's mercy. The next instant he was disarmed, and the seconds were pressing forward to end the conflict.

Honour was satisfied; the parvenu and the scion of the ancient race had crossed swords over the reputation of one of the most dissolute women in France. Déroulède's moderation was a lesson to all the hot-headed young bloods who toyed with their lives, their honour, their reputation as lightly as they did with their lace-edged handkerchiefs and gold snuff-boxes.

Already Déroulède had drawn back. With the gentle tact peculiar to kindly people, he avoided looking at his disarmed antagonist. But something in the older man's attitude seemed to further nettle the over-stimulated sensibility of the young Vicomte.

"This is no child's play, monsieur," he said excitedly. "I demand full satisfaction."

"And are you not satisfied?" queried Déroulède. "You have borne yourself bravely, you have fought in honour of your liege lady. I, on the other hand ——"

"You," shouted the boy hoarsely, "you shall publicly apologize to a noble and virtuous woman whom you have outraged—now—at once—on your knees——"

"You are mad, Vicomte," rejoined Déroulède coldly. "I am willing to ask your forgiveness for my blunder——"

"An apology—in public—on your knees——"

The boy had become more and more excited. He had suffered humiliation after humiliation. He was a mere lad, spoilt, adulated, pampered from his boy-hood: the wine had got into his head, the intoxication of rage and hatred blinded his saner judgment.

"Coward!" he shouted again and again.

His seconds tried to interpose, but he waved them feverishly aside. He would listen to no one. He saw no one save the man who had insulted Adèle, and who was heaping further insults upon her by refusing this public acknowledgment of her virtues.

De Marny hated Déroulède at this moment with the most deadly hatred the heart of man can conceive. The older man's calm, his chivalry, his consideration only enhanced the boy's anger and shame.

The hubbub had become general. Every one seemed carried away with this strange fever of enmity which was seething in the Vicomte's veins. Most of the young men crowded round De Marny, doing their best to pacify him. The Marquis de Villefranche declared that the matter was getting quite outside the rules.

No one took much notice of Déroulède. In the remote corners of the saloon a few elderly dandies were laying bets as to the ultimate issue of the quarrel.

Déroulède, however, was beginning to lose his temper. He had no friends in that room, and therefore there was no sympathetic observer there to note the gradual darkening of his eyes, like the gathering of a cloud heavy with the coming storm.

"I pray you, messieurs, let us cease the argument," he said at last, in a loud, impatient voice. "M. le Vicomte de Marny desires a further lesson, and, by God! he shall have it. En garde, M. le Vicomte!"

The crowd quickly drew back. The seconds once more assumed the bearing and imperturbable expression which their important function demanded. The hubbub ceased as the swords began to clash.

Every one felt that farce was turning to tragedy.

And yet it was obvious from the first that Déroulède merely meant once more to disarm his antagonist, to give him one more lesson, a little more severe perhaps than the last. He was such a brilliant swordsman, and De Marny was so excited, that the advantage was with him from the very first.

How it all happened, nobody afterwards could say. There is no doubt that the little Vicomte's swordplay had become more and more wild: that he uncovered himself in the most reckless way, whilst lunging wildly at his opponent's breast, until at last, in one of these mad, unguarded moments, he seemed literally to throw himself upon Déroulède's weapon.

The latter tried with lightning-swift motion of the wrist to avoid the fatal issue, but it was too late, and without a sigh or groan, scarce a tremor, the Vicomte de Marny fell.

The sword dropped out of his hand, and it was Déroulède himself who caught the boy in his arms.

It had all occurred so quickly and suddenly that no one had realized it all until it was over, and the lad was lying prone on the ground, his elegant blue satin coat stained with red, and his antagonist bending over him.

There was nothing more to be done. Etiquette demanded that Déroulède should withdraw. He was not allowed to do anything for the boy whom he had so unwillingly sent to his death.

As before, no one took much notice of him. Silence, the awesome silence caused by the presence of the great Master, fell upon all those around. Only in the far corner a shrill voice was heard to say:

"I hold you at five hundred louis, Marquis. The parvenu is a good swordsman."

The groups parted as Déroulède walked out of the room, followed by the Colonel and M. de Quettare, who stood by him to the last. Both were old and proved soldiers, both had chivalry and courage in them, with which to do tribute to the brave man whom they had seconded.

At the door of the establishment, they met the leech who had been summoned some little time ago to hold himself in readiness for any eventuality.

The great eventuality had occurred: it was beyond the leech's learning. In the brilliantly lighted saloon above, the only son of the Duc de Marny was breathing his last, whilst Déroulède, wrapping his mantle closely round him, strode out into the dark street, all alone.

2

THE head of the house of Marny was at this time barely seventy years of age. But he had lived every hour, every minute of his life, from the day when the Grand Monarque gave him his first appointment as gentleman page in waiting when he was a mere lad, barely twelve years of age, to the moment—some ten years ago now—when Nature's relentless hand struck him down in the midst of his pleasures, withered him in a flash as she does a sturdy old oak, and nailed him—a cripple, almost a dotard—to the invalid chair which he would only quit for his last resting-place.

Juliette was then a mere slip of a girl, an old man's child, the spoilt darling of his last happy years. She had retained some of the melancholy which had characterized her mother, the gentle lady who had endured so much so patiently, and who had bequeathed this final tender burden—her baby girl—to the brilliant, handsome husband whom she had so deeply loved, and so often forgiven.

When the Duc de Marny entered the final awesome stage of his gilded career, that deathlike life which he dragged on for ten years wearily to the grave, Juliette became his only joy, his one gleam of happiness in the midst of torturing memories.

In her deep, tender eyes he would see mirrored the present, the future for her, and would forget his past, with all its gaieties, its mad, merry years, that meant nothing now but bitter regrets, an endless rosary of the might-have-beens.

And then there was the boy. The little Vicomte, the future Duc de Marny, who would in *his* life and with *his* youth recreate the glory of the family, and make France once more ring with the echo of brave deeds and gallant adventures, which had made the name of Marny so glorious in camp and court.

The Vicomte was not his father's love, but he was his father's pride, and from the depths of his huge, cushioned arm-chair, the old man would listen with delight to stories from Versailles and Paris, the young Queen and the fascinating Lamballe, the latest play and the newest star in the theatrical firmament. His feeble, tottering mind would then take him back, along the paths of memory, to his own youth and his own triumphs, and in the joy and pride in his son, he would forget himself for the sake of the boy.

When they brought the Vicomte home that night, Juliette was the first to wake. She heard the noise outside the great gates, the coach slowly drawing up, the ring, for the doorkeeper, and the sound of Matthieu's mutterings, who never liked to be called up in the middle of the night to let anyone through the gates.

Somehow a presentiment of evil at once struck the young girl: the footsteps sounded so heavy and muffled along the flagged courtyard, and up the great oak staircase. It seemed as if they were carrying something heavy, something inert or dead.

She jumped out of bed and hastily wrapped a cloak round her thin girlish shoulders, and slipped her feet into a pair of heelless shoes, then she opened her bedroom door and looked out upon the landing.

Two men, whom she did not know, were walking upstairs abreast, two more were carrying a heavy burden, and Matthieu was behind moaning and crying bitterly.

Juliette did not move. She stood in the doorway rigid as a statue. The little cortège went past her. No one saw her, for the landings in the Hotel de Marny are very wide, and Matthieu's lantern only threw a dim, flickering light upon the floor.

The men stopped outside the Vicomte's room. Matthieu opened it, and then the five men disappeared within, with their heavy burden.

A moment later old Pétronelle, who had been Juliette's nurse, and was now her devoted slave, came to her, all bathed in tears.

She had just heard the news, and she could scarcely speak, but she folded the young girl, her dear pet lamb, in her arms, and rocking herself to and fro she sobbed and eased her aching, motherly heart.

But Juliette did not cry. It was all so sudden, so awful. She, at fourteen years of age, had never dreamed of death; and now there was her brother, her Philippe, in whom she had so much joy, so much pride—he was dead—and her father must be told——

The awfulness of this task seemed to Juliette like unto the last Judgment Day; a thing so terrible, so appalling, so impossible, that it would take a host of angels to proclaim its inevitableness.

The old cripple, with one foot in the grave, whose whole feeble mind, whose pride, whose final flicker of hope was concentrated in his boy, must be told that the lad had been brought home dead.

"Will you tell him, Pétronelle?" she asked repeatedly, during the brief intervals when the violence of the old nurse's grief subsided somewhat.

"No—no—darling, I cannot—I cannot——" moaned Pétronelle, amidst a renewed shower of sobs.

Juliette's entire soul—a child's soul it was—rose in revolt at thought of what was before her. She felt angered with God for having put such a thing upon her. What right had He to demand a girl of her years to endure so much mental agony?

To lose her brother, and to witness her father's grief! She couldn't! she couldn't! she couldn't! God was evil and unjust!

A distant tinkle of a bell made all her nerves suddenly quiver. Her father was awake then? He had heard the noise, and was ringing his bell to ask for an explanation of the disturbance.

With one quick movement Juliette jerked herself free from her nurse's arm, and before Pétrotelle could prevent her, she had run out of the room, straight across the dark landing to a large panelled door opposite.

The old Duc de Marny was sitting on the edge of his bed, with his long, thin legs dangling helplessly to the ground.

Crippled as he was he had struggled to this upright position, he was making frantic, miserable efforts to raise himself still further. He too, had heard the dull thud of feet, the shuffling gait of men when carrying a heavy burden.

His mind flew back half a century, to the days when he had witnessed scenes wherein he was then merely a half-interested spectator. He knew the cortège composed of valets and friends, with the leech walking beside that precious burden, which anon would be deposited on the bed and left to the tender care of a mourning family.

Who knows what pictures were conjured up before that enfeebled vision? But he guessed. And when Juliette dashed into his room and stood before him, pale, trembling, a world of misery in her great eyes, she knew that he guessed and that she need not tell him. God had already done that for her.

Pierre, the old Duc's devoted valet, dressed him as quickly as he could. M. le Duc insisted on having his *habit de cérémonie*, the rich suit of black velvet with the priceless lace and diamond buttons, which he had worn when they laid le Roi Soleil to his eternal rest.

He put on his orders and buckled on his sword. The gorgeous clothes, which had suited him so well in the prime of his manhood, hung somewhat loosely on his attenuated frame, but he looked a grand and imposing figure, with his white hair tied behind with a great black bow, and the fine jabot of beautiful point d'Angleterre falling in a soft cascade below his chin.

Then holding himself as upright as he could, he sat in his invalid chair, and four flunkeys in full livery carried him to the deathbed of his son.

All the house was astir by now. Torches burned in great sockets in the vast hall and along the massive oak stairway, and hundreds of candles flickered ghost-like in the vast apartments of the princely mansion.

The numerous servants were arrayed on the landing, all dressed in the rich livery of the ducal house.

The death of an heir of the Marnys is an event that history makes a note of.

The old Duc's chair was placed close to the bed, where lay the dead body of the young Vicomte. He made no movement, nor did he utter a word or sigh. Some of those who were present at the time declared that his mind had completely given way, and that he neither felt nor understood the death of his son.

The Marquis de Villefranche, who had followed his friend to the last, took a final leave of the sorrowing house.

Juliette scarcely noticed him. Her eyes were fixed on her father. She would not look at her brother. A childlike fear had seized her, there, suddenly, between these two silent figures: the living and the dead.

But just as the Marquis was leaving the room, the old man spoke for the first time.

"Marquis," he said very quietly, "you forget—you have not yet told me who killed my son."

"It was in fair fight, M. le Duc," replied the young Marquis, awed in spite of all his frivolity, his lightheartedness, by this strange, almost mysterious tragedy.

"Who killed my son, M. le Marquis?" repeated the old man mechanically. "I have the right to know," he added with sudden, weird energy.

"It was M. Paul Déroulède, M. le Duc," replied the Marquis. "I repeat, it was in fair fight."

The old Duc sighed as if in satisfaction. Then with a courteous gesture of farewell reminiscent of the *grand siècle*, he added:

"All thanks from me and mine to you, Marquis, would seem but a mockery. Your devotion to my son is beyond human thanks. I'll not detain you now. Farewell."

Escorted by two lackeys, the Marquis passed out of the room.

"Dismiss all the servants, Juliette; I have something to say," said the old Duc, and the young girl, silent, obedient, did as her father bade her.

Father and sister were alone with their dead.

As soon as the last hushed footsteps of the retreating servants died away in the distance, the Duc de Marny seemed to throw away the lethargy which had enveloped him until now. With a quick, feverish gesture he seized his daughter's wrist, and murmured excitedly:

"His name. You heard his name, Juliette?"

"Yes, father," replied the child.

"Paul Déroulède! Paul Déroulède! You'll not forget it?"

"Never, father!"

"He killed your brother! You understand that? Killed my only son, the hope of my house, the last descendant of the most glorious race that has ever added lustre to the history of France."

"In fair fight, father!" protested the child.

"'Tis not fair for a man to kill a boy," retorted the old man, with furious energy. "Déroulède is thirty: my boy was scarce out of his teens: may the vengeance of God fall upon the murderer!"

Juliette, awed, terrified, was gazing at her father with great, wondering eyes. He seemed unlike himself. His face wore a curious expression of ecstasy and of hatred, also of hope, and exultation, whenever he looked steadily at her.

That the final glimmer of a tottering reason was fast leaving the poor, aching head she was too young to realize. Madness was a word that had only a vague meaning for her. Though she did not understand her father at the present moment, though she was half afraid of him she would have rejected with scorn and horror any suggestion that he was mad.

Therefore when he took her hand and, drawing her nearer to the bed and to himself, placed it upon her dead brother's breast, she recoiled at the touch of the inanimate body, so unlike anything she had ever touched before, but she obeyed her father without any question, and listened to his words as to those of a sage.

"Juliette, you are now fourteen, and able to understand what I am going to ask of you. If I were not chained to this miserable chair, if I were not a hopeless, helpless, abject cripple, I would not depute anyone, not even you, my only child, to do that which God demands that one of us should do."

He paused a moment, then continued earnestly:

"Remember, Juliette, that you are of the house of Marny, that you are a Catholic, and that God hears you now. For you shall swear an oath before Him and me, an oath from which only death can relieve you. Will you swear, my child?"

"If you wish it, father."

"You have been to confession lately, Juliette?"

"Yes, father; also to holy communion, yesterday," replied the child. "It was the Fête-Dieu, you know."

"Then you are in a state of grace, my child?"

"I was yesterday morning, father," replied the young girl naïvely, "but I have committed some little sins since then."

"Then make your confession to God in your heart now. You must be in a state of grace when you speak the oath."

The child closed her eyes, and as the old man watched her, he could see the lips framing the words of her spiritual confession.

Juliette made the sign of the cross, then opened her eyes and looked at her father.

"I am ready, father," she said; "I hope God has forgiven me the little sins of yesterday."

"Will you swear, my child?"

"What, father?"

"That you will avenge your brother's death on his murderer?"

"But, father——"

"Swear it, my child!"

"How can I fulfil that oath, father?—I don't understand——"

"God will guide you, my child. When you are older you will understand."

For a moment Juliette still hesitated. She was just on that borderland between childhood and womanhood when all the sensibilities, the nervous system, the emotions, are strung to their highest pitch.

Throughout her short life she had worshipped her father with a whole-hearted, passionate devotion, which had completely blinded her to his weakening faculties and the feebleness of his mind.

She was also in that initial stage of enthusiastic piety which overwhelms every girl of temperament, if she be brought up in the Roman Catholic religion, when she is first initiated into the mysteries of the Sacraments.

Juliette had been to confession and communion. She had been confirmed by Monseigneur, the Archbishop. Her ardent nature had responded to the full to the sensuous and ecstatic expressions of the ancient faith.

And somehow her father's wish, her brother's death, all seemed mingled in her brain with that religion, for which in her juvenile enthusiasm she would willingly have laid down her life.

She thought of all the saints, whose lives she had been reading. Her young heart quivered at the thought of *their* sacrifices, their martyrdoms, their sense of duty.

An exaltation, morbid perhaps, superstitious and overwhelming took possession of her mind; also, perhaps, far back in the innermost recesses of her heart, a pride in her own importance, her mission in life, her individuality: for she was a girl after all, a mere child, about to become a woman.

But the old Duc was waxing impatient.

"Surely you do not hesitate, Juliette, with your dead brother's body clamouring mutely for revenge? You, the only Marny left now!—for from this day I too shall be as dead."

"No, father," said the young girl in an awed whisper, "I do not hesitate. I will swear, just as you bid me."

"Repeat the words after me, my child."

"Yes, father."

"Before the face of Almighty God, who sees and hears me——"

"Before the face of Almighty God, who sees and hears me," repeated Juliette firmly.

"I swear that I will seek out Paul Déroulède."

"I swear that I will seek out Paul Déroulède."

"And in any manner which God may dictate to me encompass his death, his ruin or dishonour, in revenge for my brother's death."

"And in any manner which God may dictate to me encompass his death, his ruin or dishonour, in revenge for my brother's death," said Juliette solemnly.

"May my brother's soul remain in torment until the final Judgment Day if I should break my oath, but may it rest in eternal peace the day on which his death is fitly avenged."

"May my brother's soul remain in torment until the final Judgment Day if I should break my oath, but may it rest in eternal peace the day on which his death is fitly avenged."

The child fell upon her knees. The oath was spoken, the old man was satisfied.

He called for his valet, and allowed himself quietly to be put to bed.

One brief hour had transformed a child into a woman. A dangerous transformation when the brain is overburdened with emotions, when the nerves are overstrung and the heart full to breaking

For the moment, however, the childlike nature reasserted itself for the last time, for Juliette, sobbing, had fled out of the room, to the privacy of her own apartment, and thrown herself passionately into the arms of kind old Pétronelle.

1

PARIS: 1793—
THE OUTRAGE

It would have been very difficult to say why Citizen Déroulède was quite so popular as he was. Still more difficult would it have been to state the reason why he remained immune from the prosecutions, which were being conducted at the rate of several scores a day, now against the moderate Gironde, anon against the fanatic Mountain, until the whole of

France was transformed into one gigantic prison, that daily fed the guillotine.

But Déroulède remained unscathed. Even Merlin's law of the suspect had so far failed to touch him. And when, last July, the murder of Marat brought an entire holocaust of victims to the guillotine—from Adam Lux, who would have put up a statue in honour of Charlotte Corday, with the inscription: "Greater than Brutus," to Chalier, who would have had her publicly tortured and burned at the stake for her crime—Déroulède alone said nothing, and was allowed to remain silent.

The most seething time of that seething revolution. No one knew in the morning if his head would still be on his shoulders in the evening, or if it would be held up by Citizen Samson the headsman, for the sansculottes of Paris to see.

Yet Déroulède was allowed to go his own way. Marat once said of him: "Il n'est pas dangereux." The phrase had been taken up. Within the precincts of the National Convention, Marat was still looked upon as the great protagonist of Liberty, a martyr to his own convictions carried to the extreme, to squalor and dirt, to the downward levelling of man to what is the lowest type in humanity. And his sayings were still treasured up: even the Girondins did not dare to attack his memory. Dead Marat was more powerful than his living presentment had been.

And he had said that Déroulède was not dangerous. Not dangerous to Republicanism, to liberty, to that downward, levelling process, the tearing down of old traditions, and the annihilation of past pretensions.

Déroulède had once been very rich. He had had sufficient prudence to give away in good time that which, undoubtedly, would have been taken away from him later on.

But when he gave he gave willingly, at a time when France needed it most, and before she had learned how to help herself to what she wanted.

And somehow, in this instance, France had not forgotten: an invisible fortress seemed to surround Citizen Déroulède and keep his enemies at bay. They were few, but they existed. The National Convention trusted him. "He was not dangerous" to them. The people looked upon him as one of themselves, who gave whilst he had something to give. Who can gauge that most elusive of all things: *Popularity?*

He lived a quiet life, and had never yielded to the omni-prevalent temptation of writing pamphlets, but lived alone with his mother and Anne Mie, the little orphaned cousin whom old Madame Déroulède had taken care of ever since the child could toddle.

Every one knew his house in the Rue Ecole de Médecine, not far from the one wherein Marat lived and died, the only solid, stone house in the midst of a row of hovels, evil-smelling and squalid.

The street was narrow then, as it is now, and whilst Paris was cutting off the heads of her children for the sake of Liberty and Fraternity, she had no time to bother about cleanliness and sanitation.

Rue Ecole de Médecine did little credit to the school after which it was named, and it was a most unattractive crowd that usually thronged its uneven, muddy pavements.

A neat gown, a clean kerchief, were quite an unusual sight down this way, for Anne Mie seldom went out, and old Madame Déroulède hardly ever left her room. A good deal of brandy was being drunk at the two drinking-bars, one at each end of the long, narrow street, and by five o'clock in the afternoon it was undoubtedly best for women to remain indoors.

The crowd of dishevelled elderly Amazons who stood gossiping at the street corner could hardly be called women now. A ragged petticoat, a greasy red kerchief round the head, a tattered, stained shift—to this pass of squalor and shame had Liberty brought the daughters of France.

And they jeered at any passer-by less filthy, less degraded than themselves.

"Ah! voyons l'aristo!" they shouted every time a man in decent clothes, a woman with tidy cap and apron, passed swiftly down the street.

And the afternoons were very lively. There was always plenty to see: first and foremost, the long procession of tumbrils, winding its way from the prisons to the Place de la Révolution. The forty-four thousand sections of the Committee of Public Safety sent their quota, each in their turn, to the guillotine.

At one time these tumbrils contained royal ladies and gentlemen, ci-devant dukes and princesses, aristocrats from every county in France, but now this stock was becoming exhausted. The wretched Queen Marie Antoinette still lingered in the Temple with her son and daughter. Madame Elisabeth was still allowed to say her prayers in peace, but ci-devant dukes and counts were getting scarce; those who had not perished at the hand of Citizen Samson were plying some trade in Germany or England.

There were aristocratic joiners, innkeepers, and hairdressers. The proudest names in France were hidden beneath trade signs in London and Hamburg.

A good number owed their lives to that mysterious Scarlet Pimpernel, that unknown Englishman who had snatched scores of victims from the clutches of Tinville the Prosecutor, and sent M. Chauvelin baffled, back to France.

Aristocrats were getting scarce, so it was now the turn of deputies of the National Convention, of men of letters, men of science or of art, men who had sent others to the guillotine a twelvemonth ago, and men who had been loudest in defence of anarchy and its Reign of Terror.

They had revolutionized the Calendar: the Citizen-Deputies, and every good citizen of France, called this 19th day of August, 1793, the 2nd Fructidor of the year I. of the New Era.

At six o'clock on that afternoon a young girl suddenly turned the angle of the Rue Ecole de Médecine, and after looking quickly to the right and left she began deliberately walking along the narrow street.

It was crowded just then. Groups of excited women stood jabbering before every doorway. It was the home-coming hour after the usual spectacle on the Place de la Révolution. The men had paused at the various drinking-booths, crowding the women out. It would be the turn of these Amazons next, at the brandy bars; for the moment they were left to gossip and to jeer at the passer-by.

At first the young girl did not seem to heed them. She walked quickly along, looking defiantly before her, carrying her head erect, and stepping carefully from cobblestone to cobblestone, avoiding the mud which would have dirtied her dainty shoes.

The harridans passed the time of day to her, and the time of day meant some obscene remark unfit for women's ears. The young girl wore a simple grey dress, with fine lawn kerchief neatly folded across her bosom; a large hat with flowing ribbons sat above the fairest face that ever gladdened men's eyes to see. Fairer still it would have been, but for the look of determination which made it seem hard and old for the girl's years.

She wore the tricolour scarf round her waist, else she had been more seriously molested ere now. But the Republican colours were her safeguard: whilst she walked quietly along, no one could harm her.

Then suddenly a curious impulse seemed to seize her. It was just outside the large stone house belonging to Citizen-Deputy Déroulède. She had so far taken no notice of the groups of women which she had come across. When they obstructed the footway, she had calmly stepped out into the middle of the road.

It was wise and prudent, for she could close her ears to obscene language and need pay no heed to insult.

Suddenly she threw up her head defiantly.

"Will you please let me pass?" she said loudly, as a dishevelled Amazon stood before her with arms akimbo, glancing sarcastically at the lace petticoat, which just peeped beneath the young girl's simple grey frock.

"Let her pass? Let her pass? Ho! ho! ho!" laughed the old woman, turning to the nearest group of idlers, and apostrophizing them with a loud oath. "Did *you* know, citizeness, that this street had been specially made for aristos to pass along?"

"I am in a hurry, will you let me pass at once?" commanded the young girl, tapping her foot impatiently on the ground.

There was the whole width of the street on her right, plenty of room for her to walk along. It seemed positive madness to provoke a quarrel single-handed against this noisy group of excited females, just home from the ghastly spectacle around the guillotine.

And yet she seemed to do it wilfully, as if coming to the end of her patience, all her proud, aristocratic blood in revolt against this evil-smelling crowd which surrounded her.

Half-tipsy men and noisome, naked urchins seemed to have sprung from everywhere.

"Oho, quelle aristo!" they shouted with ironical astonishment, gazing at the young girl's face, fingering her gown, thrusting begrimed, hate-distorted faces close to her own.

Instinctively she recoiled and backed towards the house immediately on her left. It was adorned with a porch made of stout oak beams, with a tiled roof; an iron lantern descended from this, and there was a stone parapet below, and a few steps, at right angles from the pavement, led up to the massive door. On these steps the young girl had taken refuge. Proud, defiant, she confronted the howling mob, which she had so wilfully provoked.

"Of a truth, Citizeness Margot, that grey dress would become you well!" suggested a young man, whose red cap hung in tatters over an evil and dissolute-looking face.

"And all that fine lace would make a splendid jabot round the aristo's neck when Citizen Samson holds up her head for us to see," added another, as with mock elegance he stooped and with two very grimy fingers slightly raised the young girl's grey frock, displaying the lace-edged petticoat beneath.

A volley of oaths and loud, ironical laughter greeted this sally.

"'Tis mighty fine lace to be thus hidden away," commented an elderly harridan. "Now, would you believe it, my fine madam, but my legs are bare underneath my kirtle?"

"And dirty, too, I'll lay a wager," laughed another. "Soap is dear in Paris just now."

"The lace on the aristo's kerchief would pay the baker's bill of a whole family for a month!" shouted an excited voice.

Heat and brandy further addled the brains of this group of French citizens; hatred gleamed out of every eye. Outrage was imminent. The young girl seemed to know it, but she remained defiant and self-possessed, gradually stepping back and back up the steps, closely followed by her assailants.

"To the Jew with the gewgaw, then!" shouted a thin, haggard female viciously, as she suddenly clutched at the young girl's kerchief, and with a mocking, triumphant laugh tore it from her bosom.

This outrage seemed to be the signal for the breaking down of the final barriers which ordinary decency should have raised. The language and vituperation became such as no chronicler could record.

The girl's dainty white neck, her clear skin, the refined contour of shoulders and bust, seemed to have aroused the deadliest lust of hate in these wretched creatures, rendered bestial by famine and squalor.

It seemed almost as if one would vie with the other in seeking for words which would most offend these small aristocratic ears.

The young girl was now crouching against the doorway, her hands held up to her ears to shut out the awful sounds. She did not seem frightened, only appalled at the terrible volcano which she had provoked.

Suddenly a miserable harridan struck her straight in the face, with hard, grimy fist, and a long shout of exultation greeted this monstrous deed.

Then only did the girl seem to lose her self-control.

"À moi," she shouted loudly, whilst hammering with both hands against the massive doorway. "À moi! Murder! Murder! Citoyen Déroulède, à moi!"

But her terror was greeted with renewed glee by her assailants. They were now roused to the highest point of frenzy: the crowd of brutes would in the next moment have torn the helpless girl from her place of refuge and dragged her into the mire, an outraged prey, for the satisfaction of an ungovernable hate.

But just as half a dozen pairs of talon-like hands clutched frantically at her skirts, the door behind her was quickly opened. She felt her arm seized firmly, and herself dragged swiftly within the shelter of the threshold.

Her senses, overwrought by the terrible adventure which she had just gone through, were threatening to reel; she heard the massive door close, shutting out the yells of baffled rage, the ironical laughter, the obscene words, which sounded in her ears like the shrieks of Dante's damned.

She could not see her rescuer, for the hall into which he had hastily dragged her was only dimly lighted. But a peremptory voice said quickly:

"Up the stairs, the room straight in front of you, my mother is there. Go quickly."

She had fallen on her knees, cowering against the heavy oak beam which supported the ceiling, and was straining her eyes to catch sight of the man, to whom at this moment she perhaps owed more than her life: but he was standing against the doorway, with his hand on the latch.

"What are you going to do?" she murmured.

"Prevent their breaking into my house in order to drag you out of it," he replied quietly; "so, I pray you, do as I bid you."

Mechanically she obeyed him, drew herself to her feet, and, turning towards the stairs, began slowly to mount the shallow steps. Her knees were shaking under her, her whole body was trembling with horror at the awesome crisis she had just traversed.

She dared not look back at her rescuer. Her head was bent, and her lips were murmuring half-audible words as she went.

Outside the hooting and yelling was becoming louder and louder. Enraged fists were hammering violently against the stout oak door.

At the top of the stairs, moved by an irresistible impulse, she turned and looked into the hall.

She saw his figure dimly outlined in the gloom, one hand on the latch, his head thrown back to watch her movements.

A door stood ajar immediately in front of her. She pushed it open and went within.

At that moment he too opened the door below. The shrieks of the howling mob once more resounded close to her ears. It seemed as if they had surrounded him. She wondered what was happening, and marvelled how he dared to face that awful crowd alone.

The room into which she had entered was gay and cheerful-looking with its dainty chintz hangings and graceful, elegant pieces of furniture. The young girl looked up as a kindly voice said to her, from out the depths of a capacious arm-chair:

"Come in, come in, my dear, and close the door behind you! Did those wretches attack you? Never mind. Paul will speak to them. Come here, my dear, and sit down; there's no cause now for fear."

Without a word the young girl came forward. She seemed now to be walking in a dream, the chintz hangings to be swaying ghostlike around her, the yells and shrieks below to come from the very bowels of the earth.

The old lady continued to prattle on. She had taken the girl's hand in hers, and was gently forcing her down on to a low stool beside her arm-chair. She was talking about Paul, and said something about Anne Mie, and then about the National Convention, and those beasts and savages, but mostly about Paul.

The noise outside had subsided. The girl felt strangely sick and tired. Her head seemed to be whirling round, the furniture to be dancing round her; the old lady's face looked at her through a swaying veil, and then—and then——

Tired Nature was having her way at last; she folded the quivering young body in her motherly arms, and wrapped the aching senses beneath her merciful mantle of unconsciousness.

2

CITIZEN-DEPUTY

When, presently, the young girl awoke, with a delicious feeling of rest and well-being, she had plenty of leisure to think.

So, then, this was his house! She has actually a guest, a rescued protégée, beneath the roof of Citoyen Déroulède.

He had dragged her from the clutches of the howling mob which she had provoked; his mother had made her welcome; a sweet-faced, young girl scarce out of her teens, sad-eyed and slightly deformed, had waited upon her and made her happy and comfortable.

Juliette de Marny was in the house of the man whom she had sworn before her God and before her father to pursue with hatred and revenge.

Ten years had gone by since then.

Lying upon the sweet-scented bed which the hospitality of the Déroulèdes had provided for her, she seemed to see passing before her the spectres of these past ten years—the first four, after her brother's death, until the old Duc de Marny's body slowly followed his soul to its grave.

After that last glimmer of life beside the deathbed of his son, the old Duc had practically ceased to be. A mute, shrunken figure, he merely existed; his mind vanished, his memory gone, a wreck whom Nature fortunately remembered at last, and finally took away from the invalid chair which had been his world.

Then came those few years at the Convent of the Ursulines. Juliette had hoped that she had a vocation; her whole soul yearned for a secluded, a religious, life, for great barriers of solemn vows and days spent in prayer and contemplation to interpose between herself and the memory of that awful night when, obedient to her father's will, she had made the solemn oath to avenge her brother's death.

She was only eighteen when she first entered the convent, directly after her father's death, when she felt very lonely—both morally and mentally lonely—and followed by the obsession of that oath.

She never spoke of it to anyone except to her confessor, and he, a simple-minded man of great learning and a total lack of knowledge of the world, was completely at a loss how to advise.

The Archbishop was consulted. He could grant a dispensation, and release her of that most solemn vow.

When first this idea was suggested to her, Juliette was exultant. Her entire nature, which in itself was wholesome, light-hearted, the very reverse of morbid, rebelled against this unnatural task placed upon her young shoulders. It was only religion—the strange, warped religion of that extraordinary age—which kept her to it, which forbade her breaking lightly that most unnatural oath.

The Archbishop was a man of many duties, many engagements. He agreed to give this strange "cas de conscience" his most earnest attention. He would make no promises. But Mademoiselle de Marny was rich: a munificent donation to the poor of Paris, or to some cause dear to the Holy Father himself, might perhaps be more acceptable to God than the fulfilment of a compulsory vow.

Juliette, within the convent walls, was waiting patiently for the Archbishop's decision at the very moment when the greatest upheaval the world has ever known was beginning to shake the very foundations of France.

The Archbishop had other things now to think about than isolated cases of conscience. He forgot all about Juliette, probably. He was busy consoling a monarch for the loss of his throne, and preparing himself and his royal patron for the scaffold.

The Convent of the Ursulines was scattered during the Terror. Every one remembers the Thermidor massacres, and the thirty-four nuns, all daughters of ancient families of France, who went so cheerfully to the scaffold.

Juliette was one of those who escaped condemnation. How or why, she herself could not have told. She was very young, and still a postulent; she was allowed to live in retirement with Pétronelle, her old nurse, who had remained faithful through all these years.

Then the Archbishop was prosecuted and imprisoned. Juliette made frantic efforts to see him, but all in vain. When he died, she looked upon her spiritual guide's death as a direct warning from God that nothing could relieve her of her oath.

She had watched the turmoils of the Revolution through the attic window of her tiny apartment in Paris. Waited upon by faithful Pétronelle, she had been forced to live on the savings of that worthy old soul, as all her property, all the Marny estates, the *dot* she took with her to the convent—everything, in fact—had been seized by the Revolutionary Government, self appointed to level fortunes, as well as individuals.

From that attic window she had seen beautiful Paris writhing under the pitiless lash of the demon of terror which it had provoked; she had heard the rumble of the tumbrils, dragging day after day their load of victims to the insatiable maker of this Revolution of Fraternity—the Guillotine.

She had seen the gay, light-hearted people of this Star-City turned to howling beasts of prey, its women changed to sexless vultures, with murderous talons implanted in everything that is noble, high or beautiful.

She was not twenty when the feeble vacillating monarch and his imperious consort were dragged back—a pair of humiliated prisoners—to the capital from which they had tried to flee.

Two years later, she had heard the cries of an entire people exulting over a regicide. Then the murder of Marat, by a young girl like herself, the pale-faced, large-eyed Charlotte, who had committed a crime for the sake of a conviction. "Greater than Brutus!" some had called her. Greater than Joan of Arc, for it was to a mission of evil and of sin that she was called from the depths of her Breton village, and not to one of glory and triumph.

"Greater than Brutus!"

Juliette followed the trial of Charlotte Corday with all the passionate ardour of her exalted temperament.

Just think what an effect it must have had upon the mind of this young girl, who for nine years—the best of her life—had also lived with the idea of a sublime mission pervading her very soul.

She watched Charlotte Corday at her trial. Conquering her natural repulsion for such scenes, and the crowds which usually watched them, she had forced her way into the foremost rank of the narrow gallery which overlooked the Hall of the Revolutionary Tribunal.

She heard the indictment, heard Tinville's speech and the calling of the witnesses.

"All this is unnecessary. I killed Marat!" Juliette heard the fresh young voice ringing out clearly above the murmur of voices, the howls of execration; she saw the beautiful young face, clear, calm, impassive.

"I killed Marat!"

And there in the special space allotted to the Citizen-Deputies, sitting among those who represented the party of the Moderate Gironde, was Paul Déroulède, the man whom she had sworn to pursue with a vengeance as great, as complete, as that which guided Charlotte Corday's hand.

She watched him during the trial, and wondered if he had any presentiment of the hatred which dogged him, like unto the one which had dogged Marat.

He was very dark, almost swarthy, a son of the South, with brown hair, free from powder, thrown back and revealing the brow of a student rather than that of a legislator. He watched Charlotte Corday earnestly, and Juliette who watched him saw the look of measureless pity which softened the otherwise hard look of his close-set eyes.

He made an impassioned speech for the defence: a speech which has become historic. It would have cost any other man his head.

Juliette marvelled at his courage; to defend Charlotte Corday was equivalent to acquiescing in the death of Marat: Marat, the friend of the people; Marat, whom his funeral orators had compared to the Great, the Sacred Leveller of Mankind!

But Déroulède's speech was not a defence, it was an appeal. The most eloquent man of that eloquent age, his words seemed to find that hidden bit of sentiment which still lurked in the hearts of these strange protagonists of Hate.

Every one round Juliette listened as he spoke: "It is Citoyen Déroulède!" whispered the bloodthirsty Amazons, who sat knitting in the gallery.

But there was no further comment. A huge, magnificently-equipped hospital for sick children had been thrown open in Paris that very morning, a gift to the nation from Citoyen Déroulède. Surely he was privileged to talk a little if it pleased him. His hospital would cover quite a good many defalcations.

Even the rabid Mountain, Danton, Merlin, Santerre, shrugged their shoulders. "It is Déroulède, let him talk an he list. Murdered Marat said of him that he was not dangerous."

Juliette heard it all. The knitters round her were talking loudly. Even Charlotte was almost forgotten whilst Déroulède talked. He had a fine voice, of strong calibre, which echoed powerfully through the hall.

He was rather short, but broad-shouldered and well knit, with an expressive hand, which looked slender and delicate below the fine lace ruffle.

Charlotte Corday was condemned. All Déroulède's eloquence could not save her.

Juliette left the court in a state of mad exultation. She was very young: the scenes she had witnessed in the past two years could not help but excite the imagination of a young girl, left entirely to her own intellectual and moral resources.

What scenes! Great God!

And now to wait for an opportunity! Charlotte Corday, the half-educated little provincial should not put to shame Mademoiselle de Marny, the daughter of a hundred dukes, of those who had made France before she took to unmaking herself.

But she could not formulate any definite plans. Pétronelle, poor old soul, her only confidante, was not of the stuff that heroines are made of. Juliette felt impelled by duty, and duty at best is not so prompt a counsellor as love or hate.

Her adventure outside Déroulède's house had not been premeditated. Impulse and coincidence had worked their will with her.

She had been in the habit, daily, for the past month, of wandering down the Rue Ecole de Médecine, ostensibly to gaze at Marat's dwelling, as crowds of idlers were wont to do, but really in order to look at Déroulède's house. Once or twice she saw him coming or going from home. Once she caught sight of the inner hall, and of a young girl in a dark kirtle and snow-white kerchief bidding him good-bye at his door. Another time she caught sight of him at the corner of the street, helping that same young girl over the muddy pavement. He had just met her, and she was carrying a basket of provisions: he took it from her and carried it to the house.

Chivalrous—eh?—and innately so, evidently, for the girl was slightly deformed: hardly a hunchback, but weak and unattractive-looking, with melancholy eyes, and a pale, pinched face.

It was the thought of that little act of simple chivalry, witnessed the day before, which caused Juliette to provoke the scene which, but for Déroulède's timely interference, might have ended so fatally. But she reckoned on that interference: the whole thing had occurred to her suddenly, and she had carried it through.

Had not her father said to her that when the time came, God would show her a means to the end?

And now she was inside the house of the man who had murdered her brother and sent her sorrowing father, a poor, senseless maniac, tottering to the grave.

Would God's finger point again, and show her what to do next, how best to accomplish what she had sworn to do?

3

HOSPITALITY

"Is there anything more I can do for you now, mademoiselle?"

The gentle, timid voice roused Juliette from the contemplation of the past.

She smiled at Anne Mie, and held her hand out towards her.

"You have all been so kind," she said, "I want to get up now and thank you all."

"Don't move unless you feel quite well."

"I am quite well now. Those horrid people frightened me so, that is why I fainted."

"They would have half-killed you, if——"

"Will you tell me where I am?" asked Juliette.

"In the house of M. Paul Déroulède—I should have said of Citizen-Deputy Déroulède. He rescued you from the mob, and pacified them. He has such a beautiful voice that he can make anyone listen to him, and——"

"And you are fond of him, mademoiselle?" added Juliette, suddenly feeling a mist of tears rising to her eyes.

"Of course I am fond of him," rejoined the other girl simply, whilst a look of the most tender-hearted devotion seemed to beautify her pale face. "He and Madame Déroulède have brought me up; I never knew my parents. They have cared for me, and he has taught me all I know."

"What do they call you, mademoiselle?"

"My name is Anne Mie."

"And mine, Juliette—Juliette Marny," she added after a slight hesitation. "I have no parents either.

My old nurse, Pétronelle, has brought me up, and—— But tell me more about M. Déroulède—I owe him so much, I'd like to know him better."

"Will you not let me arrange your hair?" said Anne Mie as if purposely evading a direct reply. 'M. Déroulède is in the salon with madame. You can see him then."

Juliette asked no more questions, but allowed Anne Mie to tidy her hair for her, to lend her a fresh kerchief and generally to efface all traces of her terrible adventure. She felt puzzled and tearful. Anne Mie's gentleness seemed somehow to jar on her spirits. She could not understand the girl's position in the Déroulède household. Was she a relative, or a superior servant? In these troublous times she might easily have been both.

In any case she was a childhood's companion of the Citizen-Deputy—whether on an equal or a humbler footing, Juliette would have given much to ascertain.

With the marvellous instinct peculiar to women of temperament, she had already divined Anne Mie's love for Déroulède. The poor young cripple's very soul seemed to quiver magnetically at the bare mention of his name, her whole face became transfigured: Juliette even thought her beautiful then.

She looked at herself critically in the glass, and adjusted a curl, which looked its best when it was rebellious. She scrutinized her own face carefully; why? she could not tell: another of those subtle feminine instincts perhaps.

The becoming simplicity of the prevailing mode suited her to perfection. The waist line, rather high but clearly defined—a precursor of the later more accentuated fashion—gave grace to her long slender limbs, and emphasized the lissomeness of her figure. The kerchief, edged with fine lace, and neatly folded across her bosom, softened the contour of her girlish bust and shoulders.

And her hair was a veritable glory round her dainty, piquant face. Soft, fair, and curly, it emerged in a golden halo from beneath the prettiest little lace cap imaginable.

She turned and faced Anne Mie, ready to follow her out of the room, and the young crippled girl sighed as she smoothed down the folds of her own apron, and gave a final touch to the completion of Juliette's attire.

The time before the evening meal slipped by like a dream-hour for Juliette.

She had lived so much alone, had led such an introspective life, that she had hardly realized and understood all that was going on around her. At the time when the inner vitality of France first asserted itself and then swept away all that hindered its mad progress, she was tied to the invalid chair of her half-demented father; then, after that, the sheltering walls of the Ursuline Convent had hidden from her mental vision the true meaning of the great conflict, between the Old Era and the New.

Déroulède was neither a pedant nor yet a revolutionary: his theories were Utopian and he had an extraordinary overpowering sympathy for his fellow-men.

After the first casual greetings with Juliette he had continued a discussion with his mother, which the young girl's entrance had interrupted.

He seemed to take but little notice of her, although at times his dark, keen eyes would seek hers, as if challenging her for a reply.

He was talking of the mob of Paris, whom he evidently understood so well. Incidents such as the one which Juliette had provoked, had led to rape and theft, often to murder, before now: but outside Citizen-Deputy Déroulède's house everything was quiet half an hour after Juliette's escape from that howling, brutish crowd.

He had merely spoken to them for about twenty minutes, and they had gone away quite quietly, without even touching one hair of his head. He seemed to love them: to know how to separate the little good that was in them from that hard crust of evil, which misery had put around their hearts.

Once he addressed Juliette somewhat abruptly: "Pardon me, mademoiselle, but for your own sake we must guard you a prisoner here awhile. No one would harm you under this roof, but it would not be safe for you to cross the neighbouring streets to-night."

"But I must go, monsieur. Indeed, indeed I must!" she said earnestly. "I am deeply grateful to you, but I could not leave Pétronelle."

"Who is Pétronelle?"

"My dear old nurse, monsieur. She has never left me. Think how anxious and miserable she must be at my prolonged absence."

"Where does she live?"

"At No. 15 Rue Taitbout, but——"

"Will you allow me to take her a message?—telling her that you are safe and under my roof, where it is obviously more prudent that you should remain at present."

"If you think it best, monsieur," she replied.

Inwardly she was trembling with excitement. God had not only brought her to this house, but willed that she should stay in it.

"In whose name shall I take the message, mademoiselle?" he asked.

"My name is Juliette Marny."

She watched him keenly as she said it, but there was not the slightest sign in his expressive face to show that he had recognized the name.

Ten years is a long time, and every one had lived through so much during those years! A wave of intense wrath swept through Juliette's soul, as she realized that he had forgotten. The name meant nothing to him! It did not recall to him the fact that his hand was stained with blood. During ten years she had suffered, she had fought with herself, fought for him as it were, against the Fate which she was destined to mete out to him, whilst he had forgotten, or at least had ceased to think.

He bowed to and went out of the room.

The wave of wrath subsided, and she was left alone with Madame Déroulède: presently Anne Mie came in.

The three women chatted together, waiting for the return of the master of the house. Juliette felt well, and, in spite of herself, almost happy. She had lived so long in the miserable little attic alone with Pétronelle that she enjoyed the well-being of this refined home. It was not so grand or gorgeous of course as her father's princely palace opposite the Louvre, a wreck now, since it was annexed by the Committee of National Defence, for the housing of soldiery. But the Déroulèdes' home was essentially a refined one. The delicate china on the tall chimney-piece, the few bits of Buhl and Vernis Martin about the room, the vision through the open doorway of the supper-table spread with a fine white cloth, and sparkling with silver, all spoke of fastidious tastes, of habits of luxury and elegance, which the spirit of Equality and Anarchy had not succeeded in eradicating.

When Déroulède came back, he brought an atmosphere of breezy cheerfulness with him.

The street was quiet now, and when walking past the hospital—his own gift to the Nation—he had been loudly cheered. One or two ironical voices had asked him what he had done with the aristo and her lace furbelows, but it remained at that and Mademoiselle Marny need have no fear.

He had brought Pétronelle along with him: his careless, lavish hospitality would have suggested the housing of Juliette's entire domestic establishment, had she possessed one.

As it was, the worthy old soul's deluge of happy tears had melted his kindly heart. He offered her and her young mistress shelter until the small cloud should have rolled by.

After that he suggested a journey to England. Emigration now was the only real safety, and Mademoiselle Marny had unpleasantly drawn on herself the attention of the Paris rabble. No doubt, within the next few days her name would figure among the "suspect." She would be safest out of the country, and could not do better than place herself under the guidance of that English enthusiast, who had helped so many persecuted Frenchmen to escape from the terrors of the Revolution: the man who was such a thorn in the flesh of the Committee of Public Safety, and who went by the nickname of The Scarlet Pimpernel.

4

THE FAITHFUL HOUSE-DOG

After supper they talked of Charlotte Corday.

Juliette clung to the vision of that heroine, and liked to talk of her. She appeared as a justification of her own actions, which somehow seemed to require justification.

She loved to hear Paul Déroulède talk; liked to provoke his enthusiasm and to see his stern, dark face light up with the inward fire of the enthusiast.

She had openly avowed herself as the daughter of the Duc de Marny. When she actually named her father, and her brother killed in duel, she saw Déroulède looking long and searchingly at her. Evidently he wondered if she knew everything: but she returned his gaze fearlessly and frankly, and he apparently was satisfied.

Madame Déroulède seemed to know nothing of the circumstances of that duel. Déroulède tried to draw Juliette out, to make her speak of her brother. She replied to his questions quite openly, but there was nothing in what she said suggestive of the fact that she knew who killed her brother.

She wanted him to know who she was. If he feared an enemy in her, there was yet time enough for him to close his doors against her.

But less than a minute later, he had renewed his warmest offers of hospitality.

"Until we can arrange for your journey to England," he added with a short sigh, as if reluctant to part from her.

To Juliette his attitude seemed one of complete indifference for the wrong he had done to her and to her father: feeling that she was an avenging spirit, with flaming sword in hand, pursuing her brother's murderer like a relentless Nemesis, she would have preferred to see him cowed before her, even afraid of her, though she was only a young and delicate girl.

She did not understand that in the simplicity of his heart he only wished to make amends. The quarrel with the young Vicomte de Marny had been forced upon him, the fight had been honourable and fair, and on his side fought with every desire to spare the young man. He had merely been the instrument of Fate, but he felt happy that Fate once more used him as her tool, this time to save the sister.

Whilst Déroulède and Juliette talked together Anne Mie cleared the supper-table, then came and sat on a low stool at madame's feet. She took no part in the conversation, but every now and then Juliette felt the girl's melancholy eyes fixed almost reproachfully upon her.

When Juliette had retired with Pétronelle, Déroulède took Anne Mie's hand in his.

"You will be kind to my guest, Anne Mie, won't you? She seems very lonely, and has gone through a great deal."

"Not more than I have," murmured the young girl involuntarily.

"You are not happy, Anne Mie? I thought——"

"Is a wretched, deformed creature ever happy?" she said with sudden vehemence, as tears of mortification rushed to her eyes in spite of herself.

"I did not think that you were wretched," he replied with some sadness, "and neither in my eyes, nor in my mother's, are you in any way deformed."

Her mood changed at once. She clung to him, pressing his hand between her own.

"Forgive me! I—I don't know what's the matter with me to-night," she said with a nervous little laugh. "Let me see, you asked me to be kind to Mademoiselle Marny, did you not?"

He nodded with a smile.

"Of course I'll be kind to her. Isn't every one kind to one who is young and beautiful, and has great appealing eyes, and soft, curly hair? Ah me! how easy is the path in life for some people! What do you want me to do, Paul? Wait on her? Be her little maid? Soothe her nerves or what? I'll do it all, though in her eyes I shall remain both wretched and deformed, a creature to pity, the harmless, necessary house-dog——"

She paused a moment: said "Good night" to him and turned to go, candle in hand, looking pathetic and fragile, with that ugly contour of shoulder which Déroulède assured her he could not see.

The candle flickered in the draught, illumining the thin, pinched face, the large melancholy eyes of the faithful house-dog.

"Who can watch and bite!" she said half-audibly as she slipped out of the room. "For I do not trust you, my fine madam, and there was something about that comedy this afternoon which somehow I don't quite understand."

5

A DAY IN THE WOODS

But whilst men and women set to work to make the towns of France hideous with their shrieks and their hootings, their mock-trials and bloody guillotines, they could not quite prevent Nature from working her sweet will with the country.

June, July, and August had received new names—they were now called Messidor, Thermidor, and Fructidor, but under these new names they continued to pour forth upon the earth the same old fruits, the same flowers, the same grass in the meadows and leaves upon the trees.

Messidor brought its quota of wild roses in the hedgerows, just as archaic June had done. Thermidor covered the barren cornfields with its flaming mantle of scarlet poppies, and Fructidor, though now called August, still tipped the wild sorrel with dots of crimson, and laid the first wash of tender colour on the pale cheeks of the ripening peaches.

And Juliette—young, girlish, feminine and inconsequent—had sighed for country and sunshine, had longed for a ramble in the woods, the music of the birds, the sight of the meadows sugared with marguerites.

She had left the house early: accompanied by Pétronelle, she had been rowed along the river as far as Suresnes. They had brought some bread and fresh butter, a little wine and fruit in a basket, and from here she meant to wander homewards through the woods.

It was all so peaceful, so remote: even the noise of shrieking, howling Paris did not reach the leafy thickets of Suresnes.

It almost seemed as if this little old-world village had been forgotten by the destroyers of France. It had never been a royal residence, the woods had never been preserved for royal sport: there was no vengeance to be wreaked upon its peaceful glades and sleepy, fragrant meadows.

Juliette spent a happy day; she loved the flowers, the trees, the birds, and Pétronelle was silent and sympathetic. As the afternoon wore on, and it was time to go home, Juliette turned townwards with a sigh.

You all know that road through the woods, which lies to the north-west of Paris: so leafy, so secluded. No large, hundred-year-old trees, no fine oaks or antique elms, but numberless delicate stems of hazelnut and young ash, covered with honeysuckle at this time of year, sweet-smelling and so peaceful after that awful turmoil of the town.

Obedient to Madame Déroulède's suggestion, Juliette had tied a tricolour scarf round her waist, and a Phrygian cap of crimson cloth, with the inevitable rosette on one side, adorned her curly head.

She had gathered a huge bouquet of poppies, marguerites and blue lupin—Nature's tribute to the national colours—and as she wandered through the sylvan glades she looked like some quaint dweller of the woods—a sprite, mayhap—with old mother Pétronelle trotting behind her, like an attendant witch.

Suddenly she paused, for in the near distance she had perceived the sound of footsteps upon the leafy turf, and the next moment Paul Déroulède emerged from out the thicket and came rapidly towards her.

"We were so anxious about you at home!" he said, almost by way of an apology. "My mother became so restless——"

"That to quiet her fears you came in search of me!" she retorted with a gay little laugh, the laugh of a young girl, scarce a woman as yet, who feels that she is good to look at, good to talk to, who feels her wings for the first time, the wings with which to soar into that mad, merry, elusive land called Romance.

Ay, her wings! but her power also! that sweet, subtle power of the woman; the yoke which men love, rail at, and love again, the yoke that enslaves them and gives them the joy of kings.

How happy the day had been! Yet it had been incomplete!

Pétronelle was somewhat dull, and Juliette was too young to enjoy long companionship with her own thoughts. Now suddenly the day seemed to have become perfect. There was some one there to appreciate the charm of the woods, the beauty of that blue sky peeping through the tangled foliage of the honeysuckle-covered trees. There was some one to talk to, some one to admire the fresh white frock Juliette had put on that morning.

"But how did you know where to find me?" she asked with a quaint touch of immature coquetry.

"I didn't know," he replied quietly. "They told me you had gone to Suresnes, and meant to wander homewards through the woods. It frightened me, for you will have to go through the north-west barrier, and——"

"Well?"

He smiled, and looked earnestly for a moment at the dainty apparition before him.

"Well, you know!" he said gaily, "that tricolour scarf and the red cap are not quite sufficient as a disguise; you look anything but a staunch friend of the people. I guessed that your muslin frock would be clean, and that there would still be some tell-tale lace upon it."

She laughed again, and with delicate fingers lifted her pretty muslin frock, displaying a white *frou-frou* of flounces beneath the hem.

"How careless and childish!" he said, almost roughly.

"Would you have me coarse and grimy to be a fitting match for your partisans?" she retorted.

His tone of mentor nettled her, his attitude seemed to her priggish and dictatorial, and as the sun disappearing behind a sudden cloud, so her childish merriment quickly gave place to a feeling of unexplainable disappointment.

"I humbly beg your pardon," he said quietly. "And must crave your kind indulgence for my mood: but I have been so anxious——"

"Why should you be anxious about me?"

She had meant to say this indifferently, as if caring little what the reply might be: but in her effort to seem indifferent her voice became haughty, a reminiscence of the days when she still was the daughter of the Duc de Marny, the richest and most high-born heiress in France.

"Was that presumptuous?" he asked, with a slight touch of irony, in response to her own hauteur.

"It was merely unnecessary," she replied. "I have already laid too many burdens on your shoulders, without wishing to add that of anxiety."

"You have laid no burden on me," he said quietly, "save one of gratitude."

"Gratitude? What have I done?"

"You committed a foolish, thoughtless act outside my door, and gave me the chance of easing my conscience of a heavy load."

"In what way?"

"I had never hoped that the Fates would be so kind as to allow me to render a member of your family a slight service."

"I understand that you saved my life the other day, Monsieur Déroulède. I know that I am still in peril and that I owe my safety to you——"

"Do you also know that your brother owed his death to me?"

She closed her lips firmly, unable to reply, wrathful with him for having suddenly and without any warning, placed a clumsy hand upon that hidden sore.

"I always meant to tell you," he continued somewhat hurriedly; "for it almost seemed to me that I have been cheating you, these last few days. I don't suppose that you can quite realize what it means to me to tell you this just now; but I owe it to you, I think. In later years you might find out, and then regret the days you spent under my roof. I called you childish a moment ago, you must forgive me; I know that you are a woman, and hope, therefore, that you will understand me. I killed your brother in fair fight. He provoked me as no man was ever provoked before——"

"Is it necessary, M. Déroulède, that you should tell me all this?" she interrupted him with some impatience.

"I thought you ought to know."

"You must know, on the other hand, that I have no means of hearing the history of the quarrel from my brother's point of view now."

The moment the words were out of her lips she had realized how cruelly she had spoken. He did not reply; he was too chivalrous, too gentle, to reproach her. Perhaps he understood for the first time how bitterly she had felt her brother's death, and how deeply she must be suffering, now that she knew herself to be face to face with his murderer.

She stole a quick glance at him, through her tears. She was deeply penitent for what she had said. It almost seemed to her as if a dual nature was at war within her.

The mention of her brother's name, the recollection of that awful night beside his dead body, of those four years whilst she watched her father's moribund reason slowly wandering towards the grave, seemed to rouse in her a spirit of rebellion, and of evil, which she felt was not entirely of herself.

The woods had become quite silent. It was late afternoon, and they had gradually wandered farther and farther away from pretty sylvan Suresnes, towards great, anarchic, death-dealing Paris. In this part of the woods the birds had left their homes; the trees, shorn of their lower branches, looked like gaunt spectres, raising melancholy heads towards the relentless, silent sky.

In the distance, from behind the barriers, a couple of miles away, the boom of a gun was heard.

"They are closing the barriers," he said quietly after a long pause. "I am glad I was fortunate enough to meet you."

"It was kind of you to seek for me," she said meekly. "I didn't mean what I said just now——"

"I pray you, say no more about it. I can so well understand. I only wish——"

"It would be best I should leave your house," she said gently; "I have so ill repaid your hospitality. Pétronelle and I can easily go back to our lodgings."

"You would break my mother's heart if you left her now," he said, almost roughly. "She has become very fond of you, and knows, just as well as I do, the dangers that would beset you outside my house. My coarse and grimy partisans," he added, with a bitter touch of sarcasm, "have that advantage, that they are loyal to me, and would not harm you while under my roof."

"But you——" she murmured.

She felt somehow that she had wounded him very deeply, and was half angry with herself for her seeming ingratitude, and yet childishly glad to have suppressed in him that attitude of mentorship, which he was beginning to assume over her.

"You need not fear that my presence will offend you much longer, mademoiselle," he said coldly. "I can quite understand how hateful it must be to you, though I would have wished that you could believe at least in my sincerity."

"Are you going away then?"

"Not out of Paris altogether. I have accepted the post of Governor of the Conciergerie."

"Ah!—where the poor Queen——"

She checked herself suddenly. Those words would have been called treasonable to the people of France.

Instinctively and furtively, as every one did in these days, she cast a rapid glance behind her.

"You need not be afraid," he said; "there is no one here but Pétronelle."

"And you."

"Oh! I echo your words. Poor Marie Antoinette!"

"You pity her?"

"How can I help it?"

"But you are of that horrible National Convention, who will try her, condemn her, execute her as they did the King."

"I am of the National Convention. But I will not condemn her, nor be a party to another crime. I go as Governor of the Conciergerie, to help her, if I can."

"But your popularity—your life—if you befriend her?"

"As you say, mademoiselle, my life, if I befriend her," he said simply.

She looked at him with renewed curiosity in her gaze.

How strange were men in these days! Paul Déroulède, the republican, the recognized idol of the lawless people of France, was about to risk his life for the woman he had helped to dethrone.

Pity with him did not end with the rabble of Paris; it had reached Charlotte Corday, though it failed to save her, and now it extended to the poor dispossessed Queen. Somehow, in his face this time, she saw either success or death.

"When do you leave?" she asked.

"To-morrow night."

She said nothing more. Strangely enough, a tinge of melancholy had settled over her spirits. No doubt the proximity of the town was the cause of this. She could already hear the familiar noise of muffled drums, the loud, excited shrieking of the mob, who stood round the gates of Paris, at this time of the evening, waiting to witness some important capture, perhaps that of a hated aristocrat striving to escape from the people's revenge.

They had reached the edge of the wood, and gradually, as she walked, the flowers she had gathered fell unheeded out of her listless hands one by one.

First the blue lupins: their bud-laden heads were heavy and they dropped to the ground, followed by the white marguerites, that lay thick behind her now on the grass like a shroud. The red poppies were the lightest, their thin gummy stalks clung to her hands longer than the rest. At last she let them fall too, singly, like great drops of blood, that glistened as her long white gown swept them aside.

Déroulède was absorbed in his thoughts, and seemed not to heed her. At the barrier, however, he roused himself and took out the passes which alone enabled Juliette and Pétronelle to re-enter the town unchallenged. He himself as Citizen-Deputy could come and go as he wished.

Juliette shuddered as the great gates closed behind her with a heavy clank. It seemed to shut out even the memory of this happy day, which for a brief space had been quite perfect.

She did not know Paris very well, and wondered where lay that gloomy Conciergerie, where a dethroned queen was living her last days, in an agonized memory of the past. But as they crossed the bridge she recognized all round her the massive towers of the great city: Notre Dame, the graceful spire of La Sainte Chapelle, the sombre outline of St. Gervais, and behind her the Louvre with its great history and irreclaimable grandeur. How small her own tragedy seemed in the midst of this great sanguinary drama, the last act of which had not yet even begun. Her own revenge, her oath, her tribulations, what were they in comparison with that great flaming Nemesis which had swept away a throne, that vow of retaliation carried out by thousands against other thousands, that long story of degradation of regicide, of fratricide, the awesome chapters of which were still being unfolded one by one?

She felt small and petty: ashamed of the pleasure she had felt in the woods, ashamed of her high spirits and light-heartedness, ashamed of that feeling of sudden pity and admiration for the man who had done her and her family so deep an injury, which she was too feeble, too vacillating, to avenge.

The majestic outline of the Louvre seemed to frown sarcastically on her weakness, the silent river to mock her and her wavering purpose. The man beside her had wronged her and hers far more deeply than the Bourbons had wronged their people. The people of France were taking their revenge, and God had at the close of this last happy day of her life pointed once more to the means for her great end.

6

THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL

It was some few hours later. The ladies sat in the drawing-room, silent and anxious.

Soon after supper a visitor had called, and had been closeted with Paul Déroulède in the latter's study for the past two hours.

A tall, somewhat lazy-looking figure, he was sitting at a table face to face with the Citizen-Deputy. On a chair beside him lay a heavy caped coat, covered with the dust and the splashings of a long journey, but he himself was attired in clothes that suggested the most fastidious taste, and the most perfect of tailors; he wore with apparent ease the eccentric fashion of the time, the short-waisted coat of many lapels, the double waistcoat and billows of delicate lace. Unlike Déroulède he was of great height, with fair hair and a somewhat lazy expression in his good-natured blue eyes, and as he spoke, there was just a soupçon of foreign accent in the pronunciation of the French vowels, a certain drawl of o's and a's, that would have betrayed the Britisher to an observant ear.

The two men had been talking earnestly for some time, the tall Englishman was watching his friend keenly, whilst an amused, pleasant smile lingered round the corners of his firm mouth and jaw. Déroulède, restless and enthusiastic, was pacing to and fro.

"But I don't understand now, how you managed to reach Paris, my dear Blakeney!" said Déroulède at last, placing an anxious hand on his friend's shoulder. "The government has not forgotten The Scarlet Pimpernel."

"La! I took care of that!" responded Blakeney with his short, pleasant laugh. "I sent Tinville my autograph this morning."

"You are mad, Blakeney!"

"Not altogether, my friend. My faith! 'twas not only foolhardiness caused me to grant that devilish prosecutor another sight of my scarlet device. I knew what you maniacs would be after, so I came across in the *Day Dream* just to see if I couldn't get my share of the fun."

"Fun, you call it?" queried the other bitterly.

"Nay! what would you have me call it? A mad, insane, senseless tragedy, with but one issue?—the guillotine for you all."

"Then why did you come?"

"To—— What shall I say, my friend?" rejoined Sir Percy Blakeney, with that inimitable drawl of his. "To give your demmed government something else to think about whilst you are all busy running your heads into a noose."

"What makes you think we are doing that?"

"Three things, my friend—may I offer you a pinch of snuff—No?—Ah well!——" And with the graceful gesture of an accomplished dandy, Sir Percy flicked off a grain of dust from his immaculate Mechlin ruffles.

"Three things," he continued quietly; "an imprisoned Queen, about to be tried for her life, the temperament of a Frenchman—some of them—and the idiocy of mankind generally. These three things make me think that a certain section of hot-headed

Republicans with yourself, my dear Déroulède, en tête, are about to attempt the most stupid, senseless, purposeless thing that was ever concocted by the excitable brain of a demmed Frenchman."

Déroulède smiled.

"Does it not seem amusing to you, Blakeney, that you should sit there and condemn anyone for planning mad, insane, senseless things."

"La! I'll not sit, I'll stand!" rejoined Blakeney with a laugh, as he drew himself up to his full height, and stretched his long, lazy limbs. "And now let me tell you, friend, that my league of The Scarlet Pimpernel never attempted the impossible, and to try and drag the Queen out of the clutches of these murderous rascals now, is attempting the unattainable."

"And yet we mean to try."

"I know it. I guessed it, that is why I came: that is also why I sent a pleasant little note to the Committee of Public Safety, signed with the device they know so well: The Scarlet Pimpernel."

"Well?"

"Well! the result is obvious. Robespierre, Danton, Tinville, Merlin, and the whole of the demmed murderous crowd, will be busy looking after me—a needle in a haystack. They'll put the abortive attempt down to me, and you may—ma foi! I only suggest that you *may*—escape safely out of France—in the *Day Dream*, and with the help of your humble servant."

"But in the meanwhile they'll discover you, and they'll not let you escape a second time."

"My friend! if a terrier were to lose his temper, he never would run a rat to earth. Now your Revolutionary Government has lost its temper with me, ever since I slipped through Chauvelin's fingers; they are blind with their own fury, whilst I am perfectly happy and cool as a cucumber. My life has become valuable to me, my friend. There is some one over the water who weeps when I don't return—— No! no! never fear—they'll not get The Scarlet Pimpernel this journey——"

He laughed, a gay, pleasant laugh, and his strong, firm face seemed to soften at thought of the beautiful wife, over in England, who was waiting anxiously for his safe return.

"And yet you'll not help us to rescue the Queen?" rejoined Déroulède, with some bitterness.

"By every means in my power," replied Blakeney, "save the insane. But I will help to get you all out of the demmed hole, when you have failed."

"We'll not fail," asserted the other hotly.

Sir Percy Blakeney went close up to his friend and placed his long, slender hand, with a touch of almost womanly tenderness, upon the latter's shoulder.

"Will you tell me your plans?"

In a moment Déroulède was all fire and enthusiasm.

"There are not many of us in it," he began, "although half France will be in sympathy with us. We have plenty of money, of course, and also the necessary disguise for the royal lady."

"Yes?"

"I, in the meanwhile, have asked for and obtained the post of Governor of the Conciergerie; I go into my new quarters to-morrow. In the meanwhile, I am making arrangements for my mother and—and those dependent upon me to quit France immediately."

Blakeney had perceived the slight hesitation when Déroulède mentioned those dependent upon him. He looked scrutinizingly at his friend, who continued quickly:

"I am still very popular among the people. My family can go about unmolested. I must get them out of France, however, in case—in case——"

"Of course," rejoined the other simply.

"As soon as I am assured that they are safe, my friends and I can prosecute our plans. You see the trial of the Queen has not yet been decided on, but I know that it is in the air. We hope to get her away, disguised in one of the uniforms of the National Guard. As you know, it will be my duty to make the final round every evening in the prison, and to see that everything is safe for the night. Two fellows watch all night, in the room next to that occupied by the Queen. Usually they drink and play cards all night long. I want an opportunity to drug their brandy, and thus to render them more loutish and idiotic than usual; then for a blow on the head that will make them senseless. It should be easy, for I have a strong fist, and after that——"

"Well? After that, friend?" rejoined Sir Percy earnestly, "after that? Shall I fill in the details of the picture?—the guard twenty-five strong outside the Conciergerie, how will you pass them?"

"I as the Governor, followed by one of my guards ——"

"To go whither?"

"I have the right to come and go as I please."

"I' faith! so you have, but 'one of your guards' —eh? Wrapped to the eyes in a long mantle to hide the female figure beneath. I have been in Paris but a few hours, and yet already I have realized that there is not one demmed citizen within its walls who does not at this moment suspect some other demmed citizen of conniving at the Queen's escape. Even the sparrows on the house-tops are objects of suspicion. No figure wrapped in a mantle will from this day forth leave Paris unchallenged."

"But you yourself, friend?" suggested Déroulède. "You think you can quit Paris unrecognized—then why not the Queen?"

"Because she is a woman, and has been a queen. She has nerves, poor soul, and weaknesses of body and of mind now. Alas for her! Alas for France! who wreaks such idle vengeance on so poor an enemy? Can you take hold of Marie Antoinette by the shoulders, shove her into the bottom of a cart and pile sacks of potatoes on the top of her? I did that to the Comtesse de Tournai and her daughter, as stiff-necked a pair of French aristocrats as ever deserved the guillotine for their insane prejudices. But can you do it to Marie Antoinette? She'd rebuke you publicly, and betray herself and you in a flash, sooner than submit to a loss of dignity."

"But would you leave her to her fate?"

"Ah! there's the trouble, friend. Do you think you need appeal to the sense of chivalry of my league? We are still twenty strong, and heart and soul in sympathy with your mad schemes. The poor, poor Queen! But you are bound to fail, and then who will help you all, if we too are put out of the way?"

"We should succeed if you helped us. At one time you used proudly to say: 'The League of The Scarlet Pimpernel has never failed.' "

"Because it attempted nothing which it could not accomplish! But, la! since you put me on my mettle —— Demm it all! I'll have to think about it!"

And he laughed that funny, somewhat inane laugh of his, which had deceived the clever men of two countries as to his real personality.

Déroulède went up to the heavy oak desk which occupied a conspicuous place in the centre of one of the walls. He unlocked it and drew forth a bundle of papers.

"Will you look through these?" he asked, handing them to Sir Percy Blakeney.

"What are they?"

"Different schemes I have drawn up, in case my original plan should not succeed."

"Burn them, my friend," said Blakeney laconically. "Have you not yet learned the lesson of never putting your hand to paper?"

"I can't burn these. You see, I shall not be able to have long conversations with Marie Antoinette. I must give her my suggestions in writing, that she may study them and not fail me, through lack of knowledge of her part."

"Better that than papers in these times, my friend: these papers, if found, would send you, untried, to the guillotine."

"I am careful, and, at present, quite beyond suspicion. Moreover, among the papers is a complete collection of passports suitable for any character the Queen and her attendant may be forced to assume. It has taken me some months to collect them, so as not to arouse suspicion; I gradually got them together, on one pretence or another: now I am ready for any eventuality——"

He suddenly paused. A look in his friend's face had given him a swift warning.

He turned, and there in the doorway, holding back the heavy portière, stood Juliette, graceful, smiling, a little pale, this no doubt owing to the flickering light of the unsnuffed candles.

So young and girlish did she look in her soft, white muslin frock that at sight of her the tension in Déroulède's face seemed to relax. Instinctively he had thrown the papers back into his desk, but his look had softened, from the fire of obstinate energy to that of inexpressible tenderness.

Blakeney was quietly watching the young girl as she stood in the doorway, a little bashful and undecided.

"Madame Déroulède sent me," she said hesitatingly, "she says the hour is getting late and she is very anxious. M. Déroulède, would you come and reassure her?"

"In a moment, mademoiselle," he replied lightly, "my friend and I have just finished our talk. May I have the honour to present him?—Sir Percy Blakeney, a traveller from England. Blakeney, this is Mademoiselle Juliette de Marny, my mother's guest."

7

A WARNING

Sir Percy bowed very low, with all the graceful flourish and elaborate gesture the eccentric customs of the time demanded.

He had not said a word, since the first exclamation of warning with which he had drawn his friend's attention to the young girl in the doorway.

Noiselessly, as she had come, Juliette glided out of the room again, leaving behind her an atmosphere of wild flowers, of the bouquet she had gathered, then scattered in the woods.

There was silence in the room for a while. Déroulède was locking up his desk and slipping the keys into his pocket.

"Shall we join my mother for a moment, Blakeney?" he said, moving towards the door.

"I shall be proud to pay my respects," replied Sir Percy; "but before we close the subject, I think I'll change my mind about those papers. If I am to be of service to you I think I had best look through them, and give you my opinion of your schemes."

Déroulède looked at him keenly for a moment.

"Certainly," he said at last, going up to his desk. "I'll stay with you whilst you read them through."

"La! not to-night, my friend," said Sir Percy lightly; "the hour is late, and madame is waiting for us. They'll be quite safe with me, an you'll entrust them to my care."

Déroulède seemed to hesitate. Blakeney had spoken in his usual airy manner, and was even now busy readjusting the set of his perfectly-tailored coat.

"Perhaps you cannot quite trust me?" laughed Sir Percy gaily. "I seemed too lukewarm just now."

"No; it's not that, Blakeney!" said Déroulède quietly at last. "There is no mistrust in me, all the mistrust is on your side."

"Faith!——" began Sir Percy.

"Nay! do not explain. I understand and appreciate your friendship, but I should like to convince you how unjust is your mistrust of one of God's purest angels, that ever walked the earth."

"Oho! that's it, is it, friend Déroulède? Methought you had foresworn the sex altogether, and now you are in love."

"Madly, blindly, stupidly in love, my friend," said Déroulède with a sigh. "Hopelessly, I fear me!"

"Why hopelessly?"

"She is the daughter of the late Duc de Marny, one of the oldest names in France; a Royalist to the backbone——"

"Hence your overwhelming sympathy for the Queen!"

"Nay! you wrong me there, friend. I'd have tried to save the Queen, even if I had never learned to love Juliette. But you see now how unjust were your suspicions."

"Had I any?"

"Don't deny it. You were loud in urging me to burn those papers a moment ago. You called them useless and dangerous and now——"

"I still think them useless and dangerous, and by reading them would wish to confirm my opinion and give weight to my arguments."

"If I were to part from them now I would seem to be mistrusting her."

"You are a mad idealist, my dear Déroulède!"

"How can I help it? I have lived under the same roof with her for three weeks now. I have begun to understand what a saint is like."

"And 'twill be when you understand that your idol has feet of clay that you'll learn the real lesson of love," said Blakeney earnestly. "Is it love to worship a saint in heaven, whom you dare not touch, who hovers above you like a cloud, which floats away from you even as you gaze? To love is to feel one being in the world at one with us, our equal in sin as well as in virtue. To love, for us men, is to clasp one woman with our arms, feeling that she lives and breathes just as we do, suffers as we do, thinks with us, loves with us, and, above all, sins with us. Your mock saint who stands in a niche is not a woman if she have not suffered, still less a woman if she have not sinned. Fall at the feet of your idol an you wish, but drag her down to your level after that—the only level she should ever reach, that of your heart."

Who shall render faithfully a true account of the magnetism which poured forth from this remarkable man as he spoke: this well-dressed, foppish apostle of the greatest love that man has ever known. And as he spoke the whole story of his own great, true love for the woman who once had so deeply wronged him seemed to stand clearly written in the strong, lazy, good-humoured, kindly face glowing with tenderness for her.

Déroulède felt this magnetism, and therefore did not resent the implied suggestion anent the saint whom he was still content to worship.

A dreamer and an idealist, his mind held spellbound by the great social problems which were causing the upheaval of a whole country, he had not yet had the time to learn the sweet lesson which Nature teaches to her elect—the lesson of a great, a true, human and passionate love. To him, at present, Juliette represented the perfect embodiment of his most idealistic dreams. She stood in his mind so far above him that if she proved unattainable, he would scarce have suffered. It was such a foregone conclusion.

Blakeney's words were the first to stir in his heart a desire for something beyond that quasi-mediæval worship, something weaker and yet infinitely stronger, something more earthly and yet almost divine.

"And now, shall we join the ladies?" said Blakeney after a long pause, during which the mental workings of his alert brain were almost visible, in the earnest look which he cast at his friend. "You shall keep the papers in your desk, give them into the keeping of your saint, trust her all in all rather than not at all, and if the time should come that your heaven-enthroned ideal fall somewhat heavily to earth, then give me the privilege of being a witness to your happiness."

"You are still mistrustful, Blakeney," said Déroulède lightly. "If you say much more I'll give these papers into Mademoiselle Marny's keeping until to-morrow."

8

ANNE MIE

THAT night when Blakeney, wrapped in his cloak, was walking down the Rue Ecole de Médecine towards his own lodgings, he suddenly felt a timid hand upon his sleeve.

Anne Mie stood beside him, her pale, melancholy face peeping up at the tall Englishman through the folds of a dark hood closely tied under her chin.

"Monsieur," she said timidly, "do not think me very presumptuous. I—I would wish to have five minutes' talk with you—may I?"

He looked down with great kindness at the quaint, wizened little figure, and the strong face softened at the sight of the poor, deformed shoulder, the hard, pinched look of the young mouth, the general look of pathetic helplessness which appeals so strongly to the chivalrous.

"Indeed, mademoiselle," he said gently, "you make me very proud; an I can serve you in any way, I pray you command me. But," he added, seeing Anne Mie's somewhat scared look, "this street is scarce fit for private conversation. Shall we try and find a better spot?"

Paris had not yet gone to bed. In these times it was really safest to be out in the open streets. There, everybody was more busy, more on the move, on the lookout for suspected houses, leaving the wanderer alone.

Blakeney led Anne Mie towards the Luxembourg Gardens, the great, devastated pleasure-ground of the ci-devant tyrants of the people. The beautiful Anne of Austria, and the Medici before her, Louis XIII and his gallant musketeers—all have given place to the great cannon-forging industry of this besieged Republic. France, attacked on every side, is forcing her sons to defend her: persecuted, martyrized, done to death by her, she is still their Mother: La Patrie, who needs their arms against the foreign foe. England is threatening the north, Prussia and Austria the east. Admiral Hood's flag is flying on Toulon Arsenal.

The siege of the Republic!

And the Republic is fighting for dear life. The Tuileries and Luxumbourg Gardens are transformed into a township of gigantic smithies; and Anne Mie, with scared eyes, and clinging to Blakeney's arm, cast furtive, terrified glances at the huge furnaces and the begrimed, darkly-scowling faces of the workers within.

"The people of France in arms against tyranny!" Great placards, bearing these inspiriting words, are affixed to gallows-shaped posts, and flutter in the evening breeze, rendered scorching by the heat of the furnaces all around.

Farther, on, a group of older men, squatting on the ground, are busy making tents, and some women—the same Megæras who daily shriek round the guillotine—are plying with needles and scissors for the purpose of making clothes for the soldiers.

The soldiers are the entire able-bodied male population of France.

"The people of France in arms against tyranny!"

That is their sign, their trade-mark; one of these placards, fitfully illumined by a torch of resin, towers above a group of children busy tearing up scraps of old linen—their mothers', their sisters' linen—in order to make lint for the wounded.

Loud curses and suppressed mutterings fill the smoke-laden air.

The people of France, in arms against tyranny, is bending its broad back before the most cruel, the most absolute and brutish slave-driving ever exercised over mankind.

Not even mediæval Christianity has ever dared such wholesale enforcements of its doctrines, as this constitution of Liberty and Fraternity.

Merlin's "Law of the Suspect" has just been formulated. From now onward each and every citizen of France must watch his words, his looks, his gestures, lest they be suspect. Of what—of treason to the Republic, to the people? Nay, worse! lest they be suspect of being suspect to the great era of Liberty.

Therefore in the smithies and among the groups of tent-makers a moment's negligence, a careless attention to the work, might lead to a brief trial on the morrow and the inevitable guillotine. Negligence is treason to the higher interests of the Republic.

Blakeney dragged Anne Mie away from the sight. These roaring furnaces frightened her; he took her down the Place St. Michel, towards the river. It was quieter here.

"What dreadful people they have become," she said, shuddering; "even I can remember how different they used to be."

The houses on the banks of the river were mostly converted into hospitals, preparatory for the great siege. Some hundred mètres lower down, the new children's hospital, endowed by Citizen-Deputy Déroulède, loomed, white, clean, and comfortable-looking, amidst its more squalid fellows.

"I think it would be best not to sit down," suggested Blakeney, "and wiser for you to throw your hood away from your face."

He seemed to have no fears for himself; many had said that he bore a charmed life; and yet ever since Admiral Hood had planted his flag on Toulon Arsenal, the English were more feared than ever, and The Scarlet Pimpernel more hated than most.

"You wished to speak to me about Paul Déroulède," he said kindly, seeing that the young girl was making desperate efforts to say what lay on her mind. "He is my friend, you know."

"Yes; that is why I wished to ask you a question," she replied.

"What is it?"

"Who is Juliette de Marny, and why did she seek an entrance into Paul's house?"

"Did she seek it, then?"

"Yes; I saw the scene from the balcony. At the time it did not strike me as a farce. I merely thought that she had been stupid and foolhardy. But since then I have reflected. She provoked the mob of the street, wilfully, just at the very moment when she reached M. Déroulède's door. She meant to appeal to his chivalry, and called for help, well knowing that he would respond."

She spoke rapidly and excitedly now, throwing off all shyness and reserve. Blakeney was forced to check her vehemence, which might have been thought "suspicious" by some idle citizen unpleasantly inclined.

"Well? And now?" he asked, for the young girl had paused, as if ashamed of her excitement.

"And now she stays in the house, on and on, day after day," continued Anne Mie, speaking more quietly, though with no less intensity. "Why does she not go? She is not safe in France. She belongs to the most hated of all the classes—the idle, rich aristocrats of the old régime. Paul has several times suggested plans for her emigration to England. Madame Déroulède, who is an angel, loves her, and would not like to part from her, but it would be obviously wiser for her to go, and yet she stays. Why?"

"Presumably because——"

"Because she is in love with Paul?" interrupted Anne Mie vehemently. "No, no; she does not love him—at least—— Oh! sometimes I don't know. Her eyes light up when he comes, and she is listless when he goes. She always spends a longer time over her toilet when we expect him home to dinner," she added, with a touch of naïve femininity. "But—if it be love, then that love is strange and unwomanly; it is a love that will not be for his good——"

"Why should you think that?"

"I don't know," said the girl simply. "Isn't it an instinct?"

"Not a very unerring one in this case, I fear."

"Why?"

"Because your own love for Paul Déroulède has blinded you—— Ah! you must pardon me, mademoiselle; you sought this conversation and not I, and I fear me I have wounded you. Yet I would wish you to know how deep is my sympathy with you, and how great my desire to render you a service if I could."

"I was about to ask a service of you, monsieur."

"Then command me, I beg of you."

"You are Paul's friend—persuade him that that woman in his house is a standing danger to his life and liberty."

"He would not listen to me."

"Oh! a man always listens to another."

"Except on one subject—the woman he loves."

He had said the last words very gently but very firmly. He was deeply, tenderly sorry for the poor, deformed, fragile girl, doomed to be a witness of that most heartrending of human tragedies, the passing away of her own scarce-hoped-for happiness. But he felt that at this moment the kindest act would be one of complete truth. He knew that Paul Déroulède's heart was completely given to Juliette de Marny; he too, like Anne Mie, instinctively mistrusted the beautiful girl and her strange, silent ways, but, unlike the poor hunchback, he knew that no sin which Juliette might commit would henceforth tear her from out the heart of his friend; that if, indeed, she turned out to be false, or even treacherous, she would, nevertheless, still hold a place in Déroulède's very soul, which no one else would ever fill.

"You think he loves her?" asked Anne Mie at last.

"I am sure of it."

"And she?"

"Ah! I do not know. I would trust your instinct —a woman's—sooner than my own."

"She is false, I tell you, and is hatching treason against Paul."

"Then all we can do is to wait."

"Wait?"

"And watch carefully, earnestly, all the time. There! shall I pledge you my word that Déroulède shall come to no harm?"

"Pledge me your word that you'll part him from that woman."

"Nay; that is beyond my power. A man like Paul Déroulède only loves once in life, but when he does, it is for always."

Once more she was silent, pressing her lips closely together, as if afraid of what she might say.

He saw that she was bitterly disappointed, and sought for a means of tempering the cruelty of the blow.

"It will be your task to watch over Paul," he said; "with your friendship to guard and protect him we need have no fear for his safety, I think."

"I will watch," she replied quietly.

Gradually he had led her steps back towards the Rue Ecole de Médecine.

A great melancholy had fallen over his bold, adventurous spirit. How full of tragedies was this great city, in the last throes of its insane and cruel struggle for an unattainable goal. And yet, despite its guillotine and mock trials, its tyrannical laws and overfilled prisons, its very sorrows paled before the dead, dull misery of this deformed girl's heart.

A wild exaltation, a fever of enthusiasm lent glamour to the scenes which were daily enacted on the Place de la Révolution, turning the final acts of the tragedies into glaring, lurid melodrama, almost unreal in its poignant appeal to the sensibilities.

But here there was only this dead, dull misery, an aching heart, a poor, fragile creature in the throes of an agonized struggle for a fast-disappearing happiness.

Anne Mie hardly knew now what she had hoped when she sought this interview with Sir Percy Blakeney. Drowning in a sea of hopelessness, she had clutched at what might prove a chance of safety. Her reason told her that Paul's friend was right. Déroulède was a man who would love but once in his life. He had never loved—for he had too much pitied—poor, pathetic little Anne Mie.

Nay; why should we say that love and pity are akin?

Love, the great, the strong, the conquering god—Love that subdues a world, and rides roughshod over principle, virtue, tradition, over home, kindred, and religion—what cares he for the easy conquest of the pathetic being, who appeals to his sympathy?

Love means equality—the same height of heroism or of sin. When Love stoops to pity, he has ceased to soar in the boundless space, that rarefied atmosphere wherein man feels himself made at last truly in the image of God.

9

JEALOUSY

At the door of her home Blakeney parted from Anne Mie, with all the courtesy with which he would have bade adieu to the greatest lady in his own land.

Anne Mie let herself into the house with her own latch-key. She closed the heavy door noiselessly, then glided upstairs like a quaint little ghost.

But on the landing above she met Paul Déroulède.

He had just come out of his room, and was still fully dressed.

"Anne Mie!" he said, with such an obvious cry of pleasure that the young girl, with beating heart, paused a moment on the top of the stairs, as if hoping to hear that cry again, feeling that indeed he was glad to see her, had been uneasy because of her long absence.

"Have I made you anxious?" she asked at last.

"Anxious!" he exclaimed. "Little one, I have hardly lived this last hour since I realized that you had gone out so late as this, and all alone."

"How did you know?"

"Mademoiselle de Marny knocked at my door an hour ago. She had gone to your room to see you, and, not finding you there, she searched the house for you, and finally, in her anxiety, came to me. We did not dare to tell my mother. I won't ask you where you have been, Anne Mie, but another time, remember, little one, that the streets of Paris are not safe, and that those who love you suffer deeply when they know you to be in peril."

"Those who love me!" murmured the girl under her breath.

"Could you not have asked me to come with you?"

"No; I wanted to be alone. The streets were quite safe, and—I wanted to speak with Sir Percy Blakeney."

"With Blakeney?" he exclaimed in boundless astonishment. "Why, what in the world did you want to say to him?"

The girl, so unaccustomed to lying, had blurted out the truth, almost against her will.

"I thought he could help me, as I was much perturbed and restless."

"You went to him sooner than to me?" said Déroulède in a tone of gentle reproach, and still puzzled at this extraordinary action on the part of the girl, usually so shy and reserved.

"My anxiety was about you, and you would have mocked me for it."

"Indeed, I should never mock you, Anne Mie. But why should you be anxious about me?"

"Because I see you wandering blindly on the brink of a great danger, and because I see you confiding in those whom you had best mistrust."

He frowned a little, and bit his lips to check the rough word that was on the tip of his tongue.

"Is Sir Percy Blakeney one of those whom I had best mistrust?" he said lightly.

"No," she answered curtly.

"Then, dear, there is no cause for unrest. He is the only one of my friends whom you have not known intimately. All those who are round me now, you know that you can trust and that you can love," he added earnestly and significantly.

He took her hand; it was trembling with obvious suppressed agitation. She knew that he had guessed what was passing in her mind, and now was deeply ashamed of what she had done. She had been tortured with jealousy for the past three weeks, but at least she had suffered quite alone: no one had been allowed to touch that wound, which more often than not, excites derision rather than pity. Now, by her own actions, two men knew her secret. Both were kind and sympathetic; but Déroulède resented her imputations, and Blakeney had been unable to help her.

A wave of morbid introspection swept over her soul. She realized in a moment how petty and base had been her thoughts and how purposeless her actions. She would have given her life at this moment to eradicate from Déroulède's mind the knowledge of her own jealousy; she hoped that at least he had not guessed her love.

She tried to read his thoughts, but in the dark passage, only dimly lighted by the candles in Déroulède's room beyond, she could not see the expression of his face, but the hand which held hers was warm and tender. She felt herself pitied, and blushed at the thought. With a hasty good night she fled down the passage, and locked herself in her room, alone with her own thoughts at last.

10

DENUNCIATION

But what of Juliette?

What of this wild, passionate, romantic creature tortured by a Titanic conflict? She, but a girl, scarcely yet a woman, torn by the greatest antagonistic powers that ever fought for a human soul. On the one side duty, tradition, her dead brother, her father—above all, her religion, and the oath she had sworn before God; on the other justice and honour, a case of right and wrong, honesty and pity.

How she fought with these powers now!

She fought with them, struggled with them on her knees. She tried to crush memory, tried to forget that awful midnight scene ten years ago, her brother's dead body, her father's avenging hand holding her own, as he begged her to do that which he was too feeble, too old to accomplish.

His words rang in her ears from across that long vista of the past.

"Before the face of Almighty God, who sees and hears me, I swear——"

And she had repeated those words loudly and of her own free will, with her hand resting on her brother's breast, and God Himself looking down upon her, for she had called upon Him to listen.

"I swear that I will seek out Paul Déroulède, and in any manner which God may dictate to me encompass his death, his ruin, or dishonour in revenge for my brother's death. May my brother's soul remain in torment until the final Judgment Day if I should break my oath, but may it rest in eternal peace the day on which his death is fitly avenged."

Almost it seemed to her as if father and brother were standing by her side, as she knelt and prayed. Oh! how she prayed!

In many ways she was only a child. All her years had been passed in confinement, either beside her dying father, or, later, between the four walls of the Ursuline Convent. And during those years her soul had been fed on a contemplative, ecstatic religion, a kind of sanctified superstition, which she would have deemed sacrilege to combat.

Her first step into womanhood was taken with that oath upon her lips; since then, with a stoical sense of duty, she had lashed herself into a daily, hourly remembrance of the great mission imposed upon her.

To have neglected it would have been, to her, equal to denying God.

She had but vague ideas of the doctrinal side of religion. Purgatory was to her merely a word, but a word representing a real spiritual state—one of expectancy, of restlessness, of sorrow. And vaguely, yet determinedly, she believed that her brother's soul suffered because she had been too weak to fulfil her oath.

The Church had not come to her rescue. The ministers of her religion were scattered to the four corners of besieged, agonizing France. She had no one to help her, no one to comfort her. That very peaceful, contemplative life she had led in the convent only served to enhance her feeling of the solemnity of her mission.

It was true, it was inevitable, because it was so hard.

To the few who, throughout those troublous times, had kept a feeling of veneration for their religion, this religion had become one of abnegation and martyrdom.

A spirit of uncompromising Jansenism seemed to call forth sacrifices and renunciation, whereas the happy-go-lucky Catholicism of the past century had only suggested an easy, flowered path, to a comfortable, well-upholstered heaven.

The harder the task seemed which was set before her, the more real it became to Juliette. God, she firmly believed, had at last, after ten years, shown her the way to wreak vengeance upon her brother's murderer. He had brought her to this house, caused her to see and hear part of the conversation between Blakeney and Déroulède, and this at the moment of all others, when even the semblance of a conspiracy against the Republic would bring the one inevitable result in its train: disgrace first, the hasty mock trial, the hall of justice, and the guillotine.

She tried not to hate Déroulède. She wished to judge him coldly, and impartially, or rather to indict him before the throne of God, and to punish him for the crime he had committed ten years ago. Her personal feelings must remain out of the question.

Had Charlotte Corday considered her own sensibilities, when with her own hand she put an end to Marat?

Juliette remained on her knees for hours. She heard Anne Mie come home, and Déroulède's voice of welcome on the landing. That was perhaps the most bitter moment of this awful soul of conflict, for it brought to her mind the remembrance of those others who would suffer too, and who were innocent —Madame Déroulède and poor, crippled Anne Mie. They had done no wrong, and yet how heavily would they be punished!

And then the saner judgment, the human, material code of ethics gained for a while the upper hand. Juliette would rise from her knees, dry her eyes, prepare quietly to go to bed, and to forget all about the awful, relentless Fate which dragged her to the fulfilment of its will, and then sink back, brokenhearted, murmuring impassioned prayers for forgiveness to her father, her brother, her God.

The soul was young and ardent, and it fought for abnegation, martyrdom, and stern duty; the body was child-like, and it fought for peace, contentment, and quiet reason.

The rational body was conquered by the passionate, powerful soul.

Blame not the child, for in herself she was innocent. She was but another of the many victims of this cruel, mad, hysterical time, that spirit of relentless tyranny, forcing its doctrines upon the weak.

With the first break of dawn Juliette at last finally rose from her knees, bathed her burning eyes and head, tidied her hair and dress, then she sat down at the table and began to write.

She was a transformed being now, no longer a child, essentially a woman—a Joan of Arc with a mission, a Charlotte Corday going to martyrdom, a human, suffering, erring soul, committing a great crime for the sake of an idea.

She wrote out carefully and with a steady hand that denunciation of Citizen-Deputy Déroulède which has become an historical document, and is preserved in the chronicles of France.

You have all seen it at the Musée Carnavalet in its glass case, its yellow paper and faded ink revealing nothing of the soul conflict of which it was the culminating victory. The cramped, somewhat schoolgirlish writing is the mute, pathetic witness of one of the saddest tragedies that era of sorrow and crime has ever known:

To the Representatives of the People now sitting in Assembly at the National Convention

You trust and believe in the Representative of the people: Citizen-Deputy Paul Déroulède. He is false, and a traitor to the Republic. He is planning, and hopes to effect, the release of ci-devant Marie Antoinette, widow of the traitor Louis Capet. Haste! ye representatives of the people! proofs of this assertion, papers and plans, are still in the house of the Citizen-Deputy Déroulède.

This statement is made by one who knows.

II. The 23rd Fructidor.

When her letter was written she read it through carefully, made the one or two little corrections, which are still visible in the document, then folded her missive, hid it within the folds of her kerchief, and, wrapping a dark cloak and hood round her, she slipped noiselessly out of her room.

The house was all quiet and still. She shuddered a little as the cool morning air fanned her hot cheeks: it seemed like the breath of ghosts.

She ran quickly down the stairs, and as rapidly as she could, pushed back the heavy bolts of the front door, and slipped out into the street.

Already the city was beginning to stir. There was no time for sleep, when so much had to be done for the safety of the threatened Republic. As Juliette turned her steps towards the river, she met the crowd of workmen whom France was employing for her defence.

Behind her, in the Luxembourg Gardens, and all along the opposite bank of the river, the furnaces were already ablaze, and the smiths at work forging the guns.

At every step now Juliette came across the great placards, pinned to the tall gallows-shaped posts, which proclaim to every passing citizen that the people of France are up and in arms.

Right across the Place de l'Institut a procession of market carts, laden with vegetables and a little fruit, wends its way slowly towards the centre of the town. They each carry tiny tricolour flags, with a Pike and Cap of Liberty surmounting the flagstaff.

They are good patriots the market-gardeners, who come in daily to feed the starving mob of Paris, with the few handfuls of watery potatoes, and miserable, vermin-eaten cabbages, which that fraternal Revolution still allows them to grow without hindrance.

Every one seems busy with their work thus early in the morning: the business of killing does not begin until later in the day.

For the moment Juliette can get along quite unmolested: the women and children are mostly hurrying on towards the vast encampments in the Tuileries, where lint, and bandages, and coats for the soldiers are manufactured all the day.

The walls of all the houses bear the great patriotic device: "*Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité, sinon La Mort*"; others are more political in their proclamation: "La Republique une et indivisible."

But on the walls of the Louvre, of the great palace of whilom kings, where the Roi Soleil held his Court, and flirted with the prettiest women in France, there the new and great Republic has affixed its final mandate.

A great poster glued to the wall bears the words: "*La Loi concernan les Suspects.*" Below the poster is a huge wooden box with a slit at the top.

This is the latest invention for securing the safety of this one and indivisible Republic.

Henceforth every one becomes a traitor at one word of denunciation from an idler or an enemy, and, as in the most tyrannical days of the Spanish Inquisition one-half of the nation was set to spy upon the other, that wooden box, with its slit, is put there ready to receive denunciations from one man against another.

Had Juliette paused but for the fraction of a second, had she stopped to read the placard setting forth this odious law, had she only reflected, then she would even now have turned back, and fled from that gruesome box of infamies as she would from a dangerous and noisome reptile or from the pestilence.

But her long vigil, her prayers, her ecstatic visions of heroic martyrs had now completely numbed her faculties. Her vitality, her sensibilities were gone: she had become an automaton gliding to her doom without a thought or a tremor.

She drew the letter from her bosom, and with a steady hand dropped it into the box. The irreclaimable had now occurred. Nothing she could henceforth say or do, no prayers or agonized vigils, no miracles even, could undo her action or save Paul Déroulède from trial and guillotine.

One or two groups of people hurrying to their work had seen her drop the letter into the box. A couple of small children paused, finger in mouth, gazing at her with inane curiosity; one woman uttered a coarse jest, all of them shrugged their shoulders, and passed on, on their way. Those who habitually crossed this spot were used to such sights.

That wooden box, with its mouth-like slit, was like an insatiable monster that was constantly fed, yet was still gaping for more.

Having done the deed Juliette turned, and as rapidly as she had come, so she went back to her temporary home.

A home no more now; she must leave it at once, to-day if possible. This much she knew, that she no longer could touch the bread of the man she had betrayed. She would not appear at breakfast, she could plead a headache, and in the afternoon Pétronelle should pack her things.

She turned into a little shop close by, and asked for a glass of milk and a bit of bread. The woman who served her eyed her with some curiosity, for Juliette just now looked almost out of her mind.

She had not yet begun to think, and she had ceased to suffer.

Both would come presently, and with them the memory of this last irretrievable hour and a just estimate of what she had done.

II

"VENGEANCE IS MINE"

THE pretence of a headache enabled Juliette to keep in her room the greater part of the day. She would have liked to shut herself out from the entire world during those hours which she spent face to face with her own thoughts and her own sufferings.

The sight of Anne Mie's pathetic little face as she brought her food and delicacies and various little comforts, was positive torture to the poor, harrowed soul.

At every sound in the great, silent house she started up, quivering with apprehension and horror. Had the sword of Damocles, which she herself had suspended, already fallen over the heads of those who had shown her nothing but kindness?

She could not think of Madame Déroulède or of Anne Mie without the most agonizing, the most torturing shame.

And what of him—the man she had so remorselessly, so ruthlessly betrayed to a tribunal which would know no mercy?

Juliette dared not think of him.

She had never tried to analyse her feelings with regard to him. At the time of Charlotte Corday's trial, when his sonorous voice rang out in its pathetic appeal for the misguided woman, Juliette had given him ungrudging admiration. She remembered now how strongly his magnetic personality had roused in her a feeling of enthusiasm for the poor girl, who had come from the depths of her quiet provincial home, in order to accomplish the horrible deed which would immortalize her name through all the ages to come, and cause her countrymen to proclaim her "greater than Brutus."

Déroulède was pleading for the life of that woman, and it was his very appeal which had aroused Juliette's dormant energy for the cause which her dead father had enjoined her not to forget. It was Déroulède again whom she had seen but a few weeks ago, standing alone before the mob who would have torn her to pieces, haranguing them on her behalf, speaking to them with that quiet, strong voice of his, ruling them with the rule of love and pity, and turning their wrath to gentleness.

Did she hate him, then?

Surely, surely she hated him for having thrust himself into her life, for having caused her brother's death and covered her father's declining years with sorrow. And, above all, she hated him—indeed, indeed it was hate!—for being the cause of this most hideous action of her life: an action to which she had been driven against her will, one of basest ingratitude and treachery, foreign to every sentiment within her heart, cowardly, abject, the unconscious outcome of this strange magnetism which emanated from him and had cast a spell over her, transforming her individuality and will power, and making of her an unconscious and automatic instrument of Fate.

She would not speak of God's finger again: It was Fate—pagan, devilish Fate!—the weird, shrivelled women who sit and spin their interminable thread. They had decreed; and Juliette, unable to fight, blind and broken by the conflict, had succumbed to the Megæras and their relentless wheel.

At length silence and loneliness became unendurable. She called to Pétronelle and ordered her to pack her boxes.

"We leave for England to-day," she said curtly.

"For England?" gasped the worthy old soul, who was feeling very happy and comfortable in this hospitable house, and was loath to leave it. "So soon?"

"Why, yes; we had talked of it for some time. We cannot remain here always. My cousins De Crécy are there, and my aunt De Coudremont. We shall be among friends, Pétronelle, if we ever get there."

"If we ever get there!" sighed poor Pétronelle; "we have but very little money, ma chérie, and no passports. Have you thought of asking M. Déroulède for them?"

"No, no," rejoined Juliette hastily; "I'll see to the passports somehow, Pétronelle. Sir Percy Blakeney is English; he'll tell me what to do."

"Do you know where he lives, my jewel?"

"Yes; I heard him tell Madame Déroulède last night that he was lodging with a provincial named Brogard at the Sign of the Cruche Cassée. I'll go seek him, Pétronelle; I am sure he will help me. The English are so resourceful and practical. He'll get us our passports, I know, and advise us as to the best way to proceed. Do you stay here and get all our things ready. I'll not be long."

She took up a cloak and hood, and, throwing them over her arm, she slipped out of the room.

Déroulède had left the house earlier in the day. She hoped that he had not yet returned, and ran down the stairs quickly, so that she might go out unperceived.

The house was quite peaceful and still. It seemed strange to Juliette that there did not hang over it some sort of pall-like presentiment of coming evil.

From the kitchen, at some little distance from the hall, Anne Mie's voice was heard singing an old ditty:

De ta tige détachée
Pauvre feuille désséchée
Où vas-tu?

Juliette paused a moment. An awful ache had seized her heart; her eyes unconsciously filled with tears, as they roamed round the walls of this house which had sheltered her so hospitably, these three weeks past.

And now whither was she going? Like the poor, dead leaf of the song, she was a wastrel, torn from the parent bough, homeless, friendless, having turned against the one hand which, in this great time of peril, had been extended to her in kindness and in love.

Conscience was beginning to rise up against her, and that hydra-headed tyrant Remorse. She closed her eyes to shut out the hideous vision of her crime; she tried to forget this home which her treachery had desecrated.

Je vais où va toute chose
Où va la feuille de rose
Et la feuille de laurier,

sang Anne Mie plaintively.

A great sob broke from Juliette's aching heart. The misery of it all was more than she could bear. Ah, pity her if you can! She had fought and striven, and been conquered. A girl's soul is so young, so impressionable; and she had grown up with that one, awful, all-pervading idea of duty to accomplish, a most solemn oath to fulfil, one sworn to her dying father, and on the dead body of her brother. She had begged for guidance, prayed for release, and the voice from above had remained silent. Weak, miserable, cringing, the human soul, when torn with earthly passion, must look to its own strength for the fight.

And now the end had come. That swift, scarce tangible dream of peace, which had flitted through her mind during the past few weeks, had vanished with the dawn, and she was left desolate, alone with her great sin and its life-long expiation.

Scarce knowing what she did, she fell on her knees, there on that threshold, which she was about to leave for ever. Fate had placed on her young shoulders a burden too heavy for her to bear.

"Juliette!"

At first she did not move. It was his voice coming from the study behind her. Its magic thrilled her, as it had done that day in the Hall of Justice. Strong, passionate, tender, it seemed now to raise every echo of response in her heart. She thought it was a dream, and remained there on her knees lest it should be dispelled.

Then she heard his footsteps on the flagstones of the hall. Anne Mie's plaintive singing had died away in the distance. She started, and jumped to her feet, hastily drying her eyes. The momentary dream was dispelled, and she was ashamed of her weakness.

He, the cause of all her sorrows, of her sin, and of her degradation, had no right to see her suffer.

She would have fled out of the house now, but it was too late. He had come out of his study, and, seeing her there on her knees weeping, he came quickly forward, trying, with all the innate chivalry of his upright nature, not to let her see that he had been a witness to her tears.

"You are going out, mademoiselle?" he said courteously, as, wrapping her cloak around her, she was turning towards the door.

"Yes, yes," she replied hastily; "a small errand, I——"

"Is it anything I can do for you?"

"No."

"If——" he added, with visible embarrassment, "if your errand would brook a delay, might I crave the honour of your presence in my study for a few moments?"

"My errand brooks of no delay, Citizen Déroulède," she said as composedly as she could, "and perhaps on my return I might——"

"I am leaving almost directly, mademoiselle, and I would wish to bid you good-bye."

He stood aside to allow her to pass, either out through the street door or across the hall to his study.

There had been no reproach in his voice towards the guest, who was thus leaving him without a word of farewell. Perhaps if there had been any, Juliette would have rebelled. As it was, an unconquerable magnetism seemed to draw her towards him, and, making an almost imperceptible sign of acquiescence, she glided past him into his room.

The study was dark and cool, for the room faced the west, and the shutters had been closed in order to keep out the hot August sun. At first Juliette could see nothing, but she felt his presence near her, as he followed her into the room, leaving the door slightly ajar.

"It is kind of you, mademoiselle," he said gently, "to accede to my request, which was perhaps presumptuous. But, you see, I am leaving this house to-day, and I had a selfish longing to hear your voice bidding me farewell."

Juliette's large, burning eyes were gradually piercing the semi-gloom around her. She could see him distinctly now, standing close beside her, in an attitude of the deepest, almost reverential respect.

The study was as usual neat and tidy, denoting the orderly habits of a man of action and energy. On the ground there was a valise, ready strapped as if for a journey, and on the top of it a bulky letter-case of stout pigskin, secured with a small steel lock. Juliette's eyes fastened upon this case with a look of fascination and of horror. Obviously it contained Déroulède's papers, the plans for Marie Antoinette's escape, the passports of which he had spoken the day before to his friend, Sir Percy Blakeney—the proofs, in fact, which she had offered to the representatives of the people, in support of her denunciation of the Citizen-Deputy.

After his request he had said nothing more. He was waiting for her to speak; but her voice felt parched; it seemed to her as if hands of steel were gripping her throat, smothering the words she would have longed to speak.

"Will you not wish me God-speed, mademoiselle?" he repeated gently.

"God-speed?" Oh, the awful irony of it all! Should God speed him to a mock trial and to the guillotine? He was going thither, though he did not know it, and was even now trying to take the hand which had deliberately sent him there.

At last she made an effort to speak, and in a toneless, even voice she contrived to murmur:

"You are not going for long, Citizen-Deputy?"

"In these times, mademoiselle," he replied, "any farewell might be for ever. But I am actually going for a month to the Conciergerie, to take charge of the unfortunate prisoner there."

"For a month!" she repeated mechanically.

"Oh yes!" he said, with a smile. "You see, our present Government is afraid that poor Marie Antoinette will exercise her fascinations over any lieutenant-governor of her prison, if he remain near her long enough, so a new one is appointed every month. I shall be in charge during this coming Vendémiaire. I shall hope to return before the equinox, but—who can tell?"

"In any case then, Citoyen Déroulède, the farewell I bid you to-night will be a very long one."

"A month will seem a century to me," he said earnestly, "since I must spend it without seeing you, but——"

He looked long and searchingly at her. He did not understand her in her present mood, so scared and wild did she seem, so unlike that girlish, light-hearted self, which had made the dull old house so bright these past few weeks.

"But I should not dare to hope," he murmured, "that a similar reason would cause you to call that month a long one."

She turned perhaps a trifle paler than she had been hitherto, and her eyes roamed round the room like those of a trapped hare seeking to escape.

"You misunderstand me, Citoyen Déroulède," she said at last hurriedly. "You have all been kind—very kind—but Pétronelle and I can no longer trespass on your hospitality. We have friends in England, and many enemies here——"

"I know," he interrupted quietly; "it would be the most arrant selfishness on my part to suggest that you should stay here an hour longer than is necessary. I fear that after to-day my roof may no longer prove a sheltering one for you. But will you allow me to arrange for your safety, as I am arranging for that of my mother and Anne Mie? My English friend, Sir Percy Blakeney, has a yacht in readiness off the Normandy coast. I have already seen to your passports and to all the arrangements of your journey as far as there, and Sir Percy, or one of his friends, will see you safely on board the English yacht. He has given me his promise that he will do this, and I trust him as I would myself. For the journey through France, my name is a sufficient guarantee that you will be unmolested; and, if you will allow it, my mother and Anne Mie will travel in your company. Then——"

"I pray you stop, Citizen Déroulède," she suddenly interrupted excitedly. "You must forgive me, but I cannot allow you thus to make any arrangements for me. Pétronelle and I must do as best we can. All your time and trouble should be spent for the benefit of those who have a claim upon you, whilst I——"

"You speak unkindly, mademoiselle; there is no question of claim."

"And you have no right to think——" she continued, with growing, nervous excitement, drawing her hand hurriedly away, for he had tried to seize it.

"Ah! pardon me," he interrupted earnestly, "there you are wrong. I have the right to think of you and for you—the inalienable right conferred upon me by my great love for you."

"Citizen-Deputy!"

"Nay, Juliette; I know my folly, and I know my presumption. I know the pride of your caste and of your party, and how much you despise the partisan of the squalid mob of France. Have I said that I aspired to gain your love? I wonder if I have ever dreamed it? I only know, Juliette, that you are to me something akin to the angels, something white and ethereal, intangible, and perhaps ununderstandable. Yet, knowing my folly, I glory in it, my dear, and I would not let you go out of my life without telling you of that, which has made every hour of the past few weeks a paradise for me—my love for you, Juliette."

He spoke in that low, impressive voice of his, and with those soft, appealing tones with which she had once heard him pleading for poor Charlotte Corday. Yet now he was not pleading for himself, not for his selfish wish or for his own happiness, only pleading for his love, that she should know of it, and, knowing it, have pity in her heart for him, and let him serve her to the end.

He did not say anything more for a while; he had taken her hand, which she no longer withdrew from him, for there was sweet pleasure in feeling his strong fingers close tremblingly over hers. He pressed his lips upon her hand, upon the soft palm and delicate wrist, his burning kisses bearing witness to the tumultuous passion which his reverence for her was holding in check.

She tried to tear herself away from him, but he would not let her go:

"Do not go away just yet, Juliette," he pleaded. "Think! I may never see you again; but when you are far from me—in England, perhaps—amongst your own kith and kin, will you try sometimes to think kindly of one who so wildly, so madly worships you?"

She would have stilled, an she could, the beating of her heart, which went out to him at last with all the passionate intensity of her great, pent-up love. Every word he spoke had its echo within her very soul, and she tried not to hear his tender appeal, not to see his dark head bending in worship before her. She tried to forget his presence, not to know that he was there—he, the man whom she had betrayed to serve her own miserable vengeance, whom in her mad, exalted rage she had thought that she hated, but whom she now knew that she loved better than her life, better than her soul, her traditions, or her oath.

Now, at this moment, she made every effort to conjure up the vision of her brother brought home dead upon a stretcher, of her father's declining years, rendered hideous by the mind unhinged through the great sorrow.

She tried to think of the avenging finger of God pointing the way to the fulfilment of her oath, and called to Him to stand by her in this terrible agony of her soul.

And God spoke to her at last; through the eternal vistas of boundless universe, from that heaven which had known no pity, His voice came to her now, clear, awesome, and implacable:

"Vengeance is mine! I will repay!"

12

THE SWORD OF DAMOCLES

"In the name of the Republic!"

Absorbed in his thoughts, his dreams, his present happiness, Déroulède had heard nothing of what was going on in the house during the past few seconds.

At first, to Anne Mie, who was still singing her melancholy ditty over her work in the kitchen, there had seemed nothing unusual in the peremptory ring at the front-door bell. She pulled down her sleeves over her thin arms, smoothed down her cooking-apron, then only did she run to see who the visitor might be.

As soon as she had opened the door, however, she understood.

Five men were standing before her, four of whom wore the uniform of the National Guard, and the fifth, the tricolour scarf fringed with gold, which denoted service under the Convention.

This man seemed to be in command of the others, and he immediately stepped into the hall, followed by his four companions, who at a sign from him, effectively cut off Anne Mie from what had been her imminent purpose—namely, to run to the study and warn Déroulède of his danger.

That it was danger of the most certain, the most deadly kind she never doubted for one moment. Even had her instinct not warned her, she would have guessed. One glance at the five men had sufficed to tell her: their attitude, their curt word of command, their air of authority as they crossed the hall—everything revealed the purpose of their visit: a domiciliary search in the house of Citizen-Deputy Déroulède.

Merlin's Law of the Suspect was in full operation. Some one had denounced the Citizen-Deputy to the Committee of Public Safety; and in this year of grace, 1793, and I. of the Revolution, men and women were daily sent to the guillotine on suspicion.

Anne Mie would have screamed had she dared, but instinct such as hers was far too keen to betray her into so injudicious an act. She felt that, were Paul Déroulède's eyes upon her at this moment, he would wish her to remain calm and outwardly serene.

The foremost man—he with the tricolour scarf—had already crossed the hall, and was standing outside the study door. It was his word of command which first roused Déroulède from his dream:

"In the name of the Republic!"

Déroulède did not immediately drop the small hand, which a moment ago he had been covering with kisses. He held it to his lips once more, very gently, lingering over this last fond caress, as if over an eternal farewell, then he straightened out his broad, well-knit figure, and turned to the door.

He was very pale, but there was neither fear nor even surprise expressed in his earnest, deep-set eyes. They still seemed to be looking afar, gazing upon a heaven-born vision, which the touch of her hand and the avowal of his love had conjured up before him.

"In the name of the Republic!"

Once more, for the third time—according to custom—the words rang out, clear, distinct, peremptory.

In that one fraction of a second, whilst those six words were spoken, Déroulède's eyes wandered swiftly towards the heavy letter-case, which now held his condemnation, and a wild, mad thought—the mere animal desire to escape from danger—surged up in his brain.

The plans for the escape of Marie Antoinette, the various passports, worded in accordance with the possible disguises the unfortunate Queen might assume—all these papers were more than sufficient proof of what would be termed his treason against the Republic.

He could already hear the indictment against him, could see the filthy mob of Paris dancing a wild saraband round the tumbril, which bore them towards the guillotine; he could hear their yells of execration, could feel the insults hurled against him by those who had most admired, most envied him. And from all this he would have escaped if he could, if it had not been too late.

It was but a second, or less, whilst the words were spoken outside his door, and whilst all other thoughts in him were absorbed in this one mad desire for escape. He even made a movement as if to snatch up the letter-case and to hide it about his person. But it was heavy and bulky; it would be sure to attract attention, and might bring upon him the additional indignity of being forced to submit to a personal search.

He caught Juliette's eyes fixed upon him with an intensity of gaze which, in that same one mad moment, revealed to him the depths of her love. Then the second's weakness was gone; he was once more quiet, firm, the man of action, accustomed to meet danger boldly, to rule and to subdue the most turgid mob. With a quiet shrug of the shoulders, he dismissed all thought of the compromising letter-case, and went to the door.

Already, as no reply had come to the third word of command, it had been thrown open from outside, and Déroulède found himself face to face with the five men.

"Citizen Merlin!" he said quietly, as he recognized the foremost among them.

"Himself, Citizen-Deputy," rejoined the latter, with a sneer, "at your service."

Anne Mie, in a remote corner of the hall, had heard the name, and felt her very soul sicken at its sound.

Merlin! Author of that infamous Law of the Suspect which had set man against man, a father against his son, brother against brother, and friend against friend, had made of every human creature a bloodhound on the track of his fellow-men, dogging in order not to be dogged, denouncing, spying, hounding, in order not to be denounced.

And he, Merlin, gloried in this, the most fiendishly evil law ever perpetrated for the degradation of the human race.

There is that sketch of him in the Musée Carnavalet, drawn just before he, in his turn, went to expiate his crimes on that very guillotine, which he had sharpened and wielded so powerfully against his fellows. The artist has well caught the slouchy, slovenly look of his loosely-knit figure, his long limbs and narrow head, with the snakelike eyes and slightly receding chin. Like Marat, his model and prototype, Merlin affected dirty, ragged clothes. The real Sansculottism, the downward levelling of his fellow-men to the lowest rung of the social ladder, pervaded every action of this noted product of the great Revolution.

Even Déroulède, whose entire soul was filled with a great, all-understanding pity for the weaknesses of mankind, recoiled at sight of this incarnation of the spirit of squalor and degradation, of all that was left of the noble Utopian theories of the makers of the Revolution.

Merlin grinned when he saw Déroulède standing there, calm, impassive, well-dressed, as if prepared to receive an honoured guest rather than a summons to submit to the greatest indignity a proud man has ever been called upon to suffer.

Merlin had always hated the popular Citizen-Deputy. Friend and boon companion of Marat and his gang, he had for over two years now exerted all the influence he possessed in order to bring Déroulède under a cloud of suspicion.

But Déroulède had the ear of the populace. No one understood as he did the tone of a Paris mob; and the National Convention, ever terrified of the volcano it had kindled, felt that a popular member of its assembly was more useful alive than dead.

But now at last Merlin was having his way. An anonymous denunciation against Déroulède had reached the Public Prosecutor that day. Tinville and Merlin were the fastest of friends, so the latter easily obtained the privilege of being the first to proclaim to his hated enemy the news of his downfall.

He stood facing Déroulède for a moment, enjoying the present situation to its full. The light from the vast hall struck full upon the powerful figure of the Citizen-Deputy and upon his firm, dark face and magnetic, restless eyes. Behind him the study, with its closely-drawn shutters, appeared wrapped in gloom.

Merlin turned to his men, and, still delighted with his position of a cat playing with a mouse, he pointed to Déroulède, with a smile and a shrug of the shoulders.

"Voyez-moi donc çà," he said, with a coarse jest, and expectorating contemptuously upon the floor, "the aristocrat seems not to understand that we are here in the name of the Republic. There is a very good proverb, Citizen-Deputy," he added, once more addressing Déroulède, "which you seem to have forgotten, and that is that the pitcher which goes too often to the well breaks at last. You have conspired against the liberties of the people for the past ten years.

Retribution has come to you at last; the people of France have come to their senses. The National Convention wants to know what treason you are hatching between these four walls, and it has deputed me to find out all there is to know."

"At your service, Citizen-Deputy!" said Déroulède, quietly stepping aside, in order to make way for Merlin and his men.

Resistance was useless, and, like all strong, determined natures, he knew when it was best to give in.

During this while, Juliette had neither moved nor uttered a sound. Little more than a minute had elapsed since the moment when the first peremptory order, to open in the name of the Republic, had sounded like the tocsin through the stillness of the house. Déroulède's kisses were still hot upon her hand, his words of love were still ringing in her ears.

And now this awful, deadly peril, which she with her own hand had brought on the man she loved!

If in one moment's anguish the soul be allowed to expiate a lifelong sin, then indeed did Juliette atone during this one terrible second.

Her conscience, her heart, her entire being rose in revolt against her crime. Her oath, her life, her final denunciation appeared before her in all their hideousness.

And now it was too late.

Déroulède stood facing Merlin, his most implacable enemy. The latter was giving orders to his men, preparatory to searching the house, and there, just on the top of the valise, lay the letter-case, obviously containing those papers, to which the day before she had overheard Déroulède making allusion, whilst he spoke to his friend, Sir Percy Blakeney.

An unexplainable instinct seemed to tell her that the papers were in that case. Her eyes were riveted on it, as if fascinated. An awful terror held her enthralled for one second more, whilst her thoughts, her longings, her desires were all centred on the safety of that one thing.

The next instant she had seized it and thrown it upon the sofa. Then seating herself beside it, with the gesture of a queen and the grace of a Parisienne, she had spread the ample folds of her skirts over the compromising case, hiding it entirely from view.

Merlin in the hall was ordering two men to stand one on each side of Déroulède, and two more to follow him into the room. Now he entered it himself, his narrow eyes trying to pierce the semi-obscurity, which was rendered more palpable by the brilliant light in the hall.

He had not seen Juliette's gesture, but he had heard the *frou-frou* of her skirts as she seated herself upon the sofa.

"You are not alone, Citizen-Deputy, I see," he said, with a sneer, as his snakelike eyes lighted upon the young girl.

"My guest, Citizen Merlin," replied Déroulède as calmly as he could—"Citizeness Juliette Marny. I know that it is useless, under these circumstances, to ask for consideration for a woman, but I pray you to remember, so far as is possible, that although we are all Republicans, we are also Frenchmen, and all still equal in our sentiment of chivalry towards our mothers, our sisters, or our guests."

Merlin chuckled, and gazed for a moment ironically at Juliette. He had held, between his talon-like fingers, that very morning, a thin scrap of paper, on which a schoolgirlish hand had scrawled the denunciation against Citizen-Deputy Déroulède.

Coarse in nature, and still coarser in thoughts, this representative of the people had very quickly arrived at a conclusion in his mind, with regard to this so-called guest in the Déroulède household.

"A discarded mistress," he muttered to himself. "Just had another scene, I suppose. He's got tired of her, and she's given him away out of spite."

Satisfied with this explanation of the situation, he was quite inclined to be amiable to Juliette. Moreover, he had caught sight of the valise, and almost thought that the young girl's eyes had directed his attention towards it.

"Open those shutters!" he commanded, "this place is like a vault."

One of the men obeyed immediately, and as the brilliant August sun came streaming into the room, Merlin once more turned to Déroulède.

"Information has been laid against you, Citizen-Deputy," he said, "by an anonymous writer, who states that you have just now in your possession correspondence or other papers intended for the Widow Capet: and the Committee of Public Safety has entrusted me and these citizens to seize such correspondence, and make you answerable for its presence in your house."

Déroulède hesitated for one brief fraction of a second. As soon as the shutters had been opened, and the room flooded in daylight, he had at once perceived that his letter-case had disappeared, and guessed, from Juliette's attitude upon the sofa, that she had concealed it about her person. It was this which caused him to hesitate.

His heart was filled with boundless gratitude to her for her noble effort to save him, but he would have given his life at this moment to undo what she had done.

The Terrorists were no respecters of persons or of sex. A domiciliary search order, in those days, conferred full powers on those in authority, and Juliette might at any moment now be peremptorily ordered to rise. Through her action she had made herself one with the Citizen-Deputy; if the case were found under the folds of her skirts, she would be accused of connivance, or at any rate of the equally grave charge of shielding a traitor.

The manly pride in him rebelled at the thought of owing his immediate safety to a woman, yet he could not now discard her help without compromising her irretrievably.

He dared not even look again towards her, for he felt that at this moment her life as well as his own lay in the quiver of an eyelid; and Merlin's keen, narrow eyes were fixed upon him in eager search for a tremor, a flash, which might betray fear or prove an admission of guilt.

Juliette sat there, calm, impassive, disdainful, and she seemed to Déroulède more angelic, more unattainable even than before. He could have worshipped her for her heroism, her resourcefulness, her quiet aloofness from all these coarse creatures who filled the room with the odour of their dirty clothes, with their rough jests, and their noisome suggestions.

"Well, Citizen-Deputy," sneered Merlin after a while, "you do not reply, I notice."

"The insinuation is unworthy of a reply, citizen," replied Déroulède quietly; "my services to the Republic are well known. I should have thought that the Committee of Public Safety would disdain an anonymous denunciation against a faithful servant of the people of France."

"The Committee of Public Safety knows its own business best, Citizen-Deputy," rejoined Merlin roughly. "If the accusation prove a calumny, so much the better for you. I presume," he added, with a sneer, "that you do not propose to offer any resistance whilst these citizens and I search your house."

Without another word Déroulède handed a bunch of keys to the man by his side. Every kind of opposition, argument even, would be worse than useless.

Merlin had ordered the valise and desk to be searched, and two men were busy turning out the contents of both on to the floor. But the desk now only contained a few private household accounts, and notes for the various speeches which Déroulède had at various times delivered in the assemblies of the National Convention. Among these a few pencil jottings for his great defence of Charlotte Corday were eagerly seized upon by Merlin, and his grimy, clawlike hands fastened upon this scrap of paper, as upon a welcome prey.

But there was nothing else of any importance. Déroulède was a man of thought and of action, with all the enthusiasm of real conviction, but none of the carelessness of a fanatic. The papers which were contained in the letter-case, and which he was taking with him to the Conciergerie, he considered were necessary to the success of his plans, otherwise he never would have kept them, and they were the only proofs that could be brought up against him.

The valise itself was only packed with the few necessaries for a month's sojourn at the Conciergerie;

and the men, under Merlin's guidance, were vainly trying to find something, anything that might be construed into treasonable correspondence with the unfortunate prisoner there.

Merlin, whilst his men were busy with the search, was sprawling in one of the big leather-covered chairs, on the arms of which his dirty finger-nails were beating an impatient devil's tattoo. He was at no pains to conceal the intense disappointment which he would experience were his errand to prove fruitless.

His narrow eyes every now and then wandered towards Juliette, as if asking for her help and guidance. She, understanding his frame of mind, responded to the look. Shutting her mentality off from the coarse suggestion of his attitude towards her, she played her part with cunning, and without flinching. With a glance here and there, she directed the men in their search. Déroulède himself could scarcely refrain from looking at her; he was puzzled, and vaguely marvelled at the perfection with which she carried through her rôle to the end.

Merlin felt himself baffled.

He knew quite well that Citizen-Deputy Déroulède was not a man to be lightly dealt with. No mere suspicion or anonymous denunciation would be sufficient in his case, to bring him before the tribunal of the Revolution. Unless there were proofs—positive, irrefutable, damnable proofs—of Paul Déroulède's treachery, the Public Prosecutor would never dare to frame an indictment against him. The mob of Paris would rise to defend its idol; the hideous hags, who plied their knitting at the foot of the scaffold, would tear the guillotine down before they would allow Déroulède to mount it.

That was Déroulède's stronghold: the people of

Paris, whom he had loved through all their infamies, and whom he had succoured and helped in their private need; and above all the women of Paris, whose children he had caused to be tended in the hospitals which he had built for them—this they had not yet forgotten, and Merlin knew it. One day they would forget—soon, perhaps—then they would turn on their former idol, and, howling, send him to his death, amidst cries of rancour and execration. When that day came there would be no need to worry about treason or about proofs. When the populace had forgotten all that he had done, then Déroulède would fall.

But that time was not yet.

The men had finished ransacking the room; every scrap of paper, every portable article had been eagerly seized upon.

Merlin, half blind with fury, had jumped to his feet.

"Search him!" he ordered peremptorily.

Déroulède set his teeth, and made no protest, calling up every fibre of moral strength within him, to aid him in submitting to this indignity. At a coarse jest from Merlin, he buried his nails into the palms of his hand, not to strike the foul-mouthed creature in the face. But he submitted, and stood impassive whilst the pockets of his coat were turned inside out by the rough hands of the soldiers.

All the while Juliette had remained silent, watching Merlin as any hawk would its prey. But the Terrorist, through the very coarseness of his nature, was in this case completely fooled.

He knew that it was Juliette who had denounced Déroulède, and had satisfied himself as to her motive. Because he was low and brutish and degraded, he never once suspected the truth, never saw in that beautiful young woman anything of the double nature within her, of that curious, self-torturing, at times morbid, sense of religion and of duty, at war with her own upright, innately healthy disposition.

The low-born, self-degraded Terrorist had put his own construction on Juliette's action, and with this he was satisfied, since it answered to his own estimate of the human race, the race which he was doing his best to bring down to the level of the beast.

Therefore, Merlin did not interfere with Juliette, but contented himself with insinuating, by jest and action, what her share in this day's work had been. To these hints Déroulède, of course, paid no heed. For him Juliette was as far above political intrigue as the angels. He would as soon have suspected one of the saints enshrined in Notre Dame as this beautiful, almost ethereal creature, who had been sent by Heaven to gladden his heart and to elevate his every thought.

But Juliette understood Merlin's attitude, and guessed that her written denunciation had come into his hands. Her every thought, every living sensation within her, was centred on this one thing: to save the man she loved from the consequences of her own crime against him. And for this, even the shadow of suspicion must be removed from him. Merlin's iniquitous law should not touch him again.

When Déroulède at last had been released, after the outrage to which he had been personally subjected, Merlin was literally, and figuratively too, looking about him for an issue to his present dubious position.

Judging others by his own standard of conduct, he feared now that the popular Citizen-Deputy would incite the mob against him, in revenge for the indignities which he had had to suffer. And with it all the Terrorist was convinced that Déroulède was guilty, that proofs of his treason did exist, if only he knew where to lay hands on them.

He turned to Juliette with an unexpressed query in his adder-like eyes. She shrugged her shoulders, and made a gesture as if pointing towards the door.

"There are other rooms in the house besides this," her gesture seemed to say; "try them. The proofs are there, 'tis for you to find them."

Merlin had been standing between her and Déroulède, so that the latter saw neither query nor reply.

"You are cunning, Citizen-Deputy," said Merlin now, turning towards him, "and no doubt you have been at pains to put your treasonable correspondence out of the way. You must understand that the Committee of Public Safety will not be satisfied with a mere examination of your study," he added, assuming an air of ironical benevolence, "and I presume you will have no objection if I and these citizen soldiers pay a visit to other portions of your house."

"As you please," responded Déroulède drily.

"You will accompany us, Citizen-Deputy," commanded the other curtly.

The four men of the National Guard formed themselves into line outside the study door; with a peremptory nod, Merlin ordered Déroulède to pass between them, then he too, prepared to follow. At the door he turned, and once more faced Juliette.

"As for you, citizeness," he said, with a sudden access of viciousness against her, "if you have brought us here on a fool's errand, it will go ill with you, remember. Do not leave the house until our return. I may have some questions to put to you."

13

TANGLED MESHES

JULIETTE waited a moment or two, until the footsteps of the six men died away up the massive oak stairs.

For the first time, since the sword of Damocles had fallen, she was alone with her thoughts.

She had but a few moments at her command in which to devise an issue out of these tangled meshes, which she had woven round the man she loved.

Merlin and his men would return anon. The comedy could not be kept up through another visit from them, and while the compromising letter-case remained in Déroulède's private study he was in imminent danger at the hands of his enemy.

She thought for a moment of concealing the case about her person, but a second's reflection showed her the futility of such a move. She had not seen the papers themselves; any one of them might be an absolute proof of Déroulède's guilt; the correspondence might be in his handwriting.

If Merlin, furious, baffled, vicious, were to order her to be searched! The horror of the indignity made her shudder, but she would have submitted to that, if thereby she could have saved Déroulède. But of this she could not be sure until after she had looked through the papers, and this she had not the time to do.

Her first and greatest idea was to get out of this room, his private study, with the compromising papers. Not a trace of them must be found here, if he were to remain beyond suspicion.

She rose from the sofa and peeped through the door. The hall was now deserted; from the left wing of the house, on the floor above, the heavy footsteps of the soldiers and Merlin's occasional brutish laugh could be distinctly heard.

Juliette listened for a moment, trying to understand what was happening. Yes; they had all gone to Déroulède's bedroom, which was on the extreme left, at the end of the first-floor landing. There might be just time to accomplish what she had now resolved to do.

As best she could, she hid the bulky leather case in the folds of her skirt. It was literally neck or nothing now. If she were caught on the stairs by one of the men nothing could save her or—possibly—Déroulède.

At any rate, by remaining where she was, by leaving the events to shape themselves, discovery was absolutely certain. She chose to take the risk.

She slipped noiselessly out of the room and up the great oak stairs. Merlin and his men, busy with their search in Déroulède's bedroom, took no heed of what was going on behind them; Juliette arrived on the landing, and turned sharply to her right, running noiselessly along the thick Aubusson carpet, and thence quickly to her own room.

All this had taken less than a minute to accomplish. The very next moment she heard Merlin's voice ordering one of his men to stand at attention on the landing, but by that time she was safe inside her room. She closed the door noiselessly.

Pétronelle, who had been busy all the afternoon packing up her young mistress's things, had fallen asleep in an arm-chair. Unconscious of the terrible events which were rapidly succeeding each other in the house, the worthy old soul was snoring peaceably, with her hands complacently folded on her ample bosom.

Juliette, for the moment, took no notice of her. As quickly and as dexterously as she could, she was tearing open the heavy leather case with a sharp pair of scissors, and very soon its contents were scattered before her on the table.

One glance at them was sufficient to convince her that most of the papers would undoubtedly, if found, send Déroulède to the guillotine. Most of the correspondence was in the Citizen-Deputy's handwriting. She had, of course, no time to examine it more closely, but instinct naturally told her that it was of a highly compromising character.

She gathered the papers up into a heap, tearing some of them up into strips; then she spread them out upon the ash-pan in front of the large earthenware stove, which stood in a corner of the room.

Unfortunately, this was a hot day in August. Her task would have been far easier if she had wished to destroy a bundle of papers in the depth of winter, when there was a good fire burning in the stove.

But her purpose was firm and her incentive the greatest that has ever spurred mankind to heroism. Regardless of any consequences to herself, she had but the one object in view, to save Déroulède at all costs.

On the wall facing her bed, and immediately above a velvet-coloured prie-Dieu, there was a small figure of the Virgin and Child—one of those quaintly pretty devices for holding holy water, which the reverent superstition of the past century rendered a necessary adjunct of every girl's room.

In front of the figure a small lamp was kept perpetually burning. This Juliette now took between her fingers carefully, lest the tiny flame should die out. First she poured the oil over the fragments of paper in the ash-pan, then with the wick she set fire to the whole compromising correspondence.

The oil helped the paper to burn quickly; the smell, or perhaps the presence of Juliette in the room, caused worthy old Pétronelle to wake.

"It's nothing, Pétronelle," said Juliette quietly; "only a few old letters I am burning. But I want to be alone for a few moments—will you go down to the kitchen until I call you?"

Accustomed to do as her young mistress commanded, Pétronelle rose without a word.

"I have finished putting away your few things, my jewel. There, there! why didn't you tell me to burn your papers for you? You have soiled your dear hands, and——"

"Sh! sh! Pétronelle!" said Juliette impatiently, and gently pushing the garrulous old woman towards the door. "Run to the kitchen now quickly, and don't come out of it until I call you. And, Pétronelle," she added, "you will see soldiers about the house perhaps."

"Soldiers! The good God have mercy!"

"Don't be frightened, Pétronelle. But they may ask you questions."

"Questions?"

"Yes; about me."

"My treasure, my jewel," exclaimed Pétronelle in alarm, "have those devils——?"

"No, no; nothing has happened as yet, but, you know, in these times there is always danger."

"Good God! Holy Mary! Mother of God!"

"Nothing'll happen if you try to keep quite calm and do exactly as I tell you Go to the kitchen, and wait there until I call you. If the soldiers come in and question you, if they try to frighten you remember that we have nothing to fear from men, and that our lives are in God's keeping."

All the while that Juliette spoke, she was watching the heap of paper being gradually reduced to ashes. She tried to fan the flames as best she could, but some of the correspondence was on tough paper, and was slow in being consumed. Pétronelle, tearful but obedient, prepared to leave the room. She was overawed by her mistress's air of aloofness, the pale face rendered ethereally beautiful by the sufferings she had gone through. The eyes glowed large and magnetic, as if in presence of spiritual visions beyond mortal ken; the golden hair looked like a saintly halo above the white, immaculate young brow.

Pétronelle made the sign of the cross, as if she were in the presence of a saint.

As she opened the door there was a sudden draught, and the last flickering flame died out in the ash-pan. Juliette, seeing that Pétronelle had gone, hastily turned over the few half-burnt fragments of paper that were left. In none of them had the writing remained legible. All that was compromising to Déroulède was effectually reduced to dust. The small wick in the lamp at the foot of the Virgin and Child had burned itself out for want of oil; there was no means for Juliette to strike another light and to destroy what remained. The leather case was, of course, still there, with its sides ripped open, an indestructible thing.

There was nothing to be done about that. Juliette after a second's hesitation threw it among her dresses in the valise.

Then she, too, went out of the room.

14

A HAPPY MOMENT

The search in the Citizen-Deputy's bedroom had proved as fruitless as that in his study. Merlin was beginning to have vague doubts as to whether he had been effectively fooled.

His manner towards Déroulède had undergone a change. He had become suave and unctuous, a kind of elephantine irony pervading his laborious attempts at conciliation. He and the Public Prosecutor would be severely blamed for this day's work, if the popular Deputy, relying upon the support of the people of Paris, chose to take his revenge.

In France, in this glorious year of the Revolution, there was but one step between censure and indictment. And Merlin knew it. Therefore, although he had not given up all hope of finding proofs of Déroulède's treason, although by the latter's attitude he remained quite convinced that such proofs did exist, he was already reckoning upon the cat's paw, the sop he would offer to that Cerberus, the Committee of Public Safety, in exchange for his own exculpation in the matter.

This sop would be Juliette, the denunciator, instead of Déroulède the denounced.

But he was still seeking for the proofs.

Somewhat changing his tactics, he had allowed Déroulède to join his mother in the living-room, and had betaken himself to the kitchen in search of Anne Mie, whom he had previously caught sight of in the hall. There he also found old Pétronelle, whom he could scare out of her wits to his heart's content, but from whom he was quite unable to extract any useful information. Pétronelle was too stupid to be dangerous, and Anne Mie was too much on the alert.

But, with a vague idea that a cunning man might choose the most unlikely places for the concealment of compromising property, he was ransacking the kitchen from floor to ceiling.

In the living-room Déroulède was doing his best to reassure his mother, who, in her turn, was forcing herself to be brave, and not to show by her tears how deeply she feared for the safety of her son. As soon as Déroulède had been freed from the presence of the soldiers, he had hastened back to his study, only to find that Juliette had gone, and that the letter-case had also disappeared. Not knowing what to think, trembling for the safety of the woman he adored, he was just debating whether he would seek for her in her own room, when she came towards him across the landing.

There seemed a halo around her now. Déroulède felt that she had never been so beautiful and to him so unattainable. Something told him then, that at this moment she was as far away from him as if she were an inhabitant of another, more ethereal planet.

When she saw him coming towards her, she put a finger to her lips, and whispered:

"Sh! sh! the papers are destroyed, burned."

"And I owe my safety to you!"

He had said it with his whole soul, an infinity of gratitude filled his heart, a joy and pride in that she had cared for his safety.

But at his words she had grown paler than she was before. Her eyes, large, dilated, and dark, were fixed upon him with an intensity of gaze which almost startled him. He thought that she was about to faint.

that the emotions of the past half-hour had been too much for her overstrung nerves. He took her hand, and gently dragged her into the living-room.

She sank into a chair, as if utterly weary and exhausted, and he, forgetting his danger, forgetting the world and all else besides, knelt at her feet, and held her hands in his.

She sat bolt upright, her great eyes still fixed upon him. At first it seemed as if he could not be satiated with looking at her; he felt as if he had never, never really seen her. She had been a dream of beauty to him ever since that awful afternoon when he had held her, half fainting, in his arms, and had dragged her under the shelter of his roof.

From that hour he had worshipped her: she had cast over him the magic spell of her refinement, her beauty, that aroma of youth and innocence which makes such a strong appeal to the man of sentiment.

He had worshipped her and not tried to understand. He would have deemed it almost sacrilege to pry into the mysteries of her inner self, of that second nature in her which at times made her silent, and almost morose, and cast a lurid gloom over her young beauty.

And though his love for her had grown in intensity, it had remained as heaven born as he deemed her to be—the love of a mortal for a saint, the ecstatic adoration of a St. Francis for his Madonna.

Sir Percy Blakeney had called Déroulède an idealist. He was that, in the strictest sense, and Juliette had embodied all that was best in his idealism.

It was for the first time to-day, that he had held her hand just for a moment longer than mere conventionality allowed. The first kiss on her finger-tips had sent the blood rushing wildly to his heart;

but he still worshipped her, and gazed upon her as upon a divinity.

She sat bolt upright in the chair, abandoning her small, cold hands to his burning grasp.

His very senses ached with the longing to clasp her in his arms, to draw her to him, and to feel her pulses beat closer against his. It was almost torture now to gaze upon her beauty—that small, oval face, almost like a child's, the large eyes which at times had seemed to be blue but which now appeared to be of a deep, unfathomable colour, like the tempestuous sea.

"Juliette!" he murmured at last, as his soul went out to her in a passionate appeal for the first kiss.

A shudder seemed to go through her entire frame, her very lips turned white and cold, and he, not understanding, timorous, chivalrous and humble, thought that she was repelled by his ardour and frightened by a passion to which she was too pure to respond.

Nothing but that one word had been spoken—just her name, an appeal from a strong man, overmastered at last by his boundless love—and she, poor, stricken soul, who had so much loved, so deeply wronged him, shuddered at the thought of what she might have done, had Fate not helped her to save him.

Half ashamed of his passion, he bowed his dark head over her hands, and, once more forcing himself to be calm now, he kissed her finger-tips reverently.

When he looked up again the hard lines in her face had softened, and two tears were slowly trickling down her pale cheeks.

"Will you forgive me, madonna?" he said gently. "I am only a man and you are very beautiful. No—don't take your little hands away. I am quite calm now, and know how one should speak to angels."

Reason, justice, rectitude—everything was urging Juliette to close her ears to the words of love, spoken by the man whom she had betrayed. But who shall blame her for listening to the sweetest sound the ears of a woman can ever hear—the sound of the voice of the loved one in his first declaration of love?

She sat and listened, whilst he whispered to her those soft, endearing words, of which a strong man alone possesses the enchanting secret.

She sat and listened, whilst all around her was still. Madame Déroulède, at the farther end of the room, was softly muttering a few prayers.

They were all alone these two in the mad and beautiful world, which man has created for himself—the world of romance—that world more wonderful than any heaven, where only those may enter who have learned the sweet lesson of love. Déroulède roamed in it at will. He had created his own romance, wherein he was as a humble worshipper, spending his life in the service of his madonna.

And she, too, forgot the earth, forgot the reality, her oath, her crime and its punishment, and began to think that it was good to live, good to love, and good to have at her feet the one man in all the world whom she could fondly worship.

Who shall tell what he whispered? Enough that she listened and that she smiled; and he, seeing her smile, felt happy.

15

DETECTED

The opening and shutting of the door roused them both from their dreams.

Anne Mie, pale, trembling, with eyes looking wild and terrified, had glided into the room.

Déroulède had sprung to his feet. In a moment he had thrust his own happiness into the background at sight of the poor child's obvious suffering. He went quickly towards her, and would have spoken to her, but she ran past him up to Madame Déroulède, as if she were beside herself with some unexplainable terror.

"Anne Mie," he said firmly, "what is it? Have those devils dared——"

In a moment reality had come rushing back upon him with full force, and bitter reproaches surged up in his heart against himself, for having in this moment of selfish joy forgotten those who looked up to him for help and protection.

He knew the temper of the brutes who had been set upon his track, knew that low-minded Merlin and his noisome ways, and blamed himself severely for having left Anne Mie and Pétronelle alone with him even for a few moments.

But Anne Mie quickly reassured him.

"They have not molested us much," she said, speaking with a visible effort and enforced calmness. "Pétronelle and I were together, and they made us open all the cupboards and uncover all the dishes. They then asked us many questions."

"Questions? Of what kind!" asked Déroulède.

"About you, Paul," replied Anne Mie, "and about maman, and also about—about the citizeness, your guest."

Déroulède looked at her closely, vaguely wondering at the strange attitude of the child. She was evidently labouring under some strong excitement, and in her thin, brown little hand she was clutching a piece of paper.

"Anne Mie! Child," he said very gently, "you seem quite upset—as if something terrible had happened. What is that paper you are holding, my dear?"

Anne Mie gazed down upon it. She was obviously making frantic efforts to maintain her self-possession.

Juliette at first sight of Anne Mie seemed literally to have been turned to stone. She sat upright, rigid as a statue, her eyes fixed upon the poor, crippled girl as if upon an inexorable judge, about to pronounce sentence upon her of life or death.

Instinct, that keen sense of coming danger which Nature sometimes gives to her elect, had told her that, within the next few seconds, her doom would be sealed; that Fate would descend upon her, holding the sword of Nemesis; and it was Anne Mie's tiny, half-shrivelled hand which had placed that sword into the grasp of Fate.

"What is that paper? Will you let me see it, Anne Mie?" repeated Déroulède.

"Citizen Merlin gave it to me just now," began Anne Mie more quietly; "he seems very wroth at finding nothing compromising against you, Paul. They were a long time in the kitchen, and now they have gone to search my room and Pétronelle's; but Merlin—oh! that awful man!—he seemed like a beast infuriated with his disappointment."

"Yes, yes."

"I don't know what he hoped to get out of me, for I told him that you never spoke to your mother or to me about your political business, and that I was not in the habit of listening at the keyholes."

"Yes. And——"

"Then he began to speak of—of our guest—but, of course, there again I could tell him nothing. He seemed to be puzzled as to who had denounced you. He spoke about an anonymous denunciation, which reached the Public Prosecutor early this morning. It was written on a scrap of paper, and thrown into the public box, it seems, and——"

"It is indeed very strange," said Déroulède, musing over this extraordinary occurrence, and still more over Anne Mie's strange excitement in the telling of it. "I never knew I had a hidden enemy. I wonder if I shall ever find out——"

"That is just what I said to Citizen Merlin," rejoined Anne Mie.

"What?"

"That I wondered if you, or—or any of us who love you, will ever find out who your hidden enemy might be."

"It was a mistake to talk so fully with such a brute, little one."

"I didn't say much, and I thought it wisest to humour him, as he seemed to wish to talk on that subject."

"Well? And what did he say?"

"He laughed, and asked me if I would very much like to know."

"I hope you said No, Anne Mie?"

"Indeed, indeed, I said Yes," she retorted with sudden energy, her eyes fixed now upon Juliette, who still sat rigid and silent, watching every movement of Anne Mie from the moment in which she began to tell her story. "Would I not wish to know who is your enemy, Paul—the creature who was base and treacherous enough to attempt to deliver you into the hands of those merciless villains? What wrong had you done to anyone?"

"Sh! Hush, Anne Mie; you are too excited," he said, smiling now, in spite of himself, at the young girl's vehemence over what he thought was but a trifle—the discovery of his own enemy.

"I am sorry, Paul. How can I help being excited," rejoined Anne Mie with quaint, pathetic gentleness, "when I speak of such base treachery as that which Merlin has suggested?"

"Well? And what did he suggest?"

"He did more than suggest," whispered Anne Mie almost inaudibly; "he gave me this paper—the anonymous denunciation which reached the Public Prosecutor this morning—he thought one of us might recognize the handwriting."

Then she paused, some five steps away from Déroulède, holding out towards him the crumpled paper, which up to now she had clutched determinedly in her hand. Déroulède was about to take it from her, and just before he had turned to do so, his eyes had lighted on Juliette.

She said nothing, she had merely risen instinctively, and had reached Anne Mie's side in less than the fraction of a second.

It was all a flash, and there was dead silence in the room, but in that one-hundredth part of a second, Déroulède had read guilt in the face of Juliette.

It was nothing but instinct, a sudden, awful, unexplainable revelation. Her soul seemed suddenly to stand before him in all its misery and in all its sin.

It was as if the fire from heaven had descended in one terrific crash, burying beneath its devastating flames his ideals, his happiness, and his divinity. She was no longer there. His madonna had ceased to be.

There stood before him a beautiful woman, on whom he had lavished all the pent-up treasures of his love, whom he had succoured, sheltered, and protected, and who had repaid him thus.

She had forced an entry into his house; she had spied upon him, dogged him, lied to him. The moment was too sudden, too awful for him to make even a wild guess at her motives. His entire life, his whole past, the present, and the future, were all blotted out in this awful dispersal of his most cherished dream. He had forgotten everything else save her appalling treachery; how could he even remember that once, long ago, in fair fight, he had killed her brother?

She did not even try now to hide her guilt. A look of appeal, touching in its trustfulness, went out to him, begging him to spare her further shame. Perhaps she felt that love, such as his, could not be killed in a flash.

His entire nature was full of pity, and to that pity she made a final appeal, lest she should be humiliated before Madame Déroulède and Anne Mie.

And he, still under the spell of those magic moments when he had knelt at her feet, understood her prayer, and closing his eyes just for one brief moment in order to shut out for ever that radiant vision of a pure angel whom he had worshipped, turned quietly to Anne Mie.

"Give me that paper, Anne Mie," he said coldly. "I may perhaps recognize the handwriting of my most bitter enemy."

"'Tis unnecessary now," replied Anne Mie slowly, still gazing at the face of Juliette, in which she too had read what she wished to read.

The paper dropped out of her hand.

Déroulède stooped to pick it up. He unfolded it, smoothed it out, and then saw that it was blank.

"There is nothing written on this paper," he said mechanically.

"No," rejoined Anne Mie; "no other words save the story of her treachery."

"What you have done is evil and wicked, Anne Mie."

"Perhaps so; but I had guessed the truth, and I wished to know. God showed me this way, how to do it, and how to let you know as well."

"The less you speak of God just now, Anne Mie, the better, I think. Will you attend to maman? she seems faint and ill."

Madame Déroulède, silent and placid in her armchair, had watched the tragic scene before her, almost like a disinterested spectator. All her ideas and all her thoughts had been paralysed since the moment when the first summons at the front door had warned her of the imminence of the peril to her son.

The final discovery of Juliette's treachery had left her impassive. Since her son was in danger, she cared little as to whence that danger had come.

Obedient to Déroulède's wish, Anne Mie was attending to the old lady's comforts. The poor, crippled girl was already feeling the terrible reaction of her deed.

In her childish mind she had planned this way in which to bring the traitor to shame. Anne Mie knew nothing, cared nothing, about the motives which had actuated Juliette; all she knew was that a terrible Judas-like deed had been perpetrated against the man on whom she herself had lavished her pathetic, hopeless love.

All the pent-up jealousy which had tortured her for the past three weeks rose up, and goaded her into unmasking her rival.

Never for a moment did she doubt Juliette's guilt. The god of love may be blind, tradition has so decreed it, but the demon of jealousy has a hundred eyes, more keen than those of the lynx.

Anne Mie, pushed aside by Merlin's men when they forced their way into Déroulède's study, had, nevertheless, followed them to the door. When the curtains were drawn aside and the room filled with light she had seen Juliette enthroned, apparently calm and placid, upon the sofa.

It was instinct, the instinct born of her own rejected passion, which caused her to read in the beautiful girl's face all that lay hidden behind the pale, impassive mask. That same second sight made her understand Merlin's hints and allusions. She caught every inflection of his voice, heard everything, saw everything.

And in the midst of her anxiety and her terrors for the man she loved, there was the wild, primitive, intensely human joy at the thought of bringing that enthroned idol, who had stolen his love, down to earth at last.

Anne Mie was not clever; she was simple and childish, with no complexity of passions or devious ways of intellect. It was her elemental jealousy which suggested the cunning plan for the unmasking of Juliette. She would make the girl cringe and fear, threaten her with discovery, and through her very terror shame her before Paul Déroulède.

And now it was all done; it had all occurred as she had planned it. Paul knew that his love had been wasted upon a liar and a traitor, and Juliette stood pale, humiliated, a veritable wreck of shamed humanity.

Anne Mie had triumphed, and was profoundly, abjectly wretched in her triumph. Great sobs seemed to tear at her very heart-strings. She had pulled down Paul's idol from her pedestal, but the one look she had cast at his face had shown her that she had also wrecked his life.

He seemed almost old now. The earnest, restless gaze had gone from his eyes; he was staring mutely before him, twisting between nerveless fingers that blank scrap of paper which had been the means of annihilating his dream.

All energy of attitude, all strength of bearing, which were his chief characteristics, seemed to have gone. There was a look of complete blankness, of hopelessness in his listless gesture.

"How he loved her!" sighed Anne Mie, as she tenderly wrapped the shawl round Madame Déroulède's shoulders.

Juliette had said nothing; it seemed as if her very life had gone out of her. She was a mere statue now, her mind numb, her heart dead, her very existence a fragile piece of mechanism. But she was looking at Déroulède. That one sense in her had remained alive: her sight.

She looked and looked: and saw every passing sign of mental agony on his face: the look of recognition of her guilt, the bewilderment at the appalling crash, and now that hideous death-like emptiness of his soul and mind.

Never once did she detect horror or loathing. He had tried to save her from being further humiliated before his mother, but there was no hatred or contempt in his eyes, when he realized that she had been unmasked by a trick.

She looked and looked, for there was no hope in her, not even despair. There was nothing in her mind, nothing in her soul, but a great pall-like blank.

Then gradually, as the minutes sped on, she saw the strong soul within him make a sudden fight against the darkness of his despair: the movement of the fingers became less listless; the powerful, energetic figure straightened itself out; remembrance of other matters, other interests than his own began to lift the overwhelming burden of his grief.

He remembered the letter-case containing the compromising papers. A vague wonder arose in him as to Juliette's motives in warding off, through her concealment of it, the inevitable moment of its discovery by Merlin.

The thought that her entire being had undergone a change, and that she now wished to save him, never once entered his mind; if it had, he would have dismissed it as the outcome of maudlin sentimentality, the conceit of the fop, who believes his personality to be irresistible.

His own self-torturing humility pointed but to the one conclusion: that she had fooled him all along; fooled him when she sought his protection; fooled him when she taught him to love her; fooled him, above all, at the moment when, subjugated by the intensity of his passion, he had for one brief second ceased to worship in order to love.

When the bitter remembrance of that moment of sweetest folly rushed back to his aching brain, then at last did he look up at her with one final, agonized look of reproach, so great, so tender, and yet so final, that Anne Mie, who saw it, felt as if her own heart would break with the pity of it all.

But Juliette had caught the look too. The tension of her nerves seemed suddenly to relax. Memory rushed back upon her with tumultuous intensity. Very gradually her knees gave beneath her, and at last she knelt down on the floor before him, her golden head bent under the burden of her guilt and her shame.

16

UNDER ARREST

Déroulède did not attempt to go to her.

Only presently, when the heavy footsteps of Merlin and his men were once more heard upon the landing, she quietly rose to her feet.

She had accomplished her act of humiliation and repentance, there before them all. She looked for the last time upon those whom she had so deeply wronged, and in her heart spoke an eternal farewell to that great, and mighty, and holy love which she had called forth and then had so hopelessly crushed.

Now she was ready for the atonement.

Merlin had already swaggered into the room. The long and arduous search throughout the house had not improved either his temper or his personal appearance. He was more covered with grime than he had been before, and his narrow forehead had almost disappeared beneath the tangled mass of his ill-kempt hair, which he had perpetually tugged forward and roughed up in his angry impatience.

One look at his face had already told Juliette what she wished to know. He had searched her room, and found the fragments of burnt paper, which she had purposely left in the ash-pan.

How he would act now was the one thing of importance left for Juliette to ponder over. That she would not escape arrest and condemnation was at once made clear to her. Merlin's look of sneering contempt, when he glanced towards her, had told her that.

Déroulède himself had been conscious of a feeling of intense relief when the men re-entered the room. The tension had become unendurable. When he saw his dethroned madonna kneel in humiliation at his feet, an overwhelming pain had wrenched his very heart-strings.

And yet he could not go to her. The passionate, human nature within him felt a certain proud exultation at seeing her there.

She was not above him now, she was no longer akin to the angels.

He had given no further thought to his own immediate danger. Vaguely he guessed that Merlin would find the leather case. Where it was he could not tell; perhaps Juliette herself had handed it to the soldiers. She had only hidden it for a few moments, out of impulse perhaps, fearing lest, at the first instant of its discovery, Merlin might betray her.

He remembered now those hints and insinuations which had gone out from the Terrorist to Juliette whilst the search was being conducted in the study. At the time he had merely looked upon these as a base attempt at insult, and had tortured himself almost beyond bearing, in the endeavour to refrain from punishing that evil-mouthed creature, who dared to bandy words with his madonna.

But now he understood, and felt his very soul writhing with shame at the remembrance of it all.

Oh yes; the return of Merlin and his men, the presence of these grimy, degraded brutes, was welcome now. He would have wished to crowd in the entire world, the universe and its population, between him and his fallen idol.

Merlin's manner towards him had lost nothing of its ironical benevolence. There was even a touch of obsequiousness apparent in the ugly face, as the representative of the people approached the popular Citizen-Deputy.

"Citizen-Deputy," began Merlin, "I have to bring you the welcome news that we have found nothing in your house that in any way can cast suspicion upon your loyalty to the Republic. My orders, however, were to bring you before the Committee of Public Safety, whether I had found proofs of your guilt or not. I have found none."

He was watching Déroulède keenly, hoping even at this eleventh hour to detect a look or a sign, which would furnish him with the proofs for which he was seeking. The slightest suggestion of relief on Déroulède's part, a sigh of satisfaction, would have been sufficient at this moment to convince him and the Committee of Public Safety that the Citizen-Deputy was guilty after all.

But Déroulède never moved. He was sufficiently master of himself not to express either surprise or satisfaction. Yet he felt both—satisfaction not for his own safety, but because of his mother and Anne Mie, whom he would immediately send out of the country, out of all danger; and also because of her, of Juliette Marny, his guest, who, whatever she may have done against him, had still a claim on his protection. His feeling of surprise was less keen, and quite transient. Merlin had not found the letter-case. Juliette, stricken with tardy remorse perhaps, had succeeded in concealing it. The matter had practically ceased to interest him. It was equally galling to owe his betrayal or his ultimate safety to her.

He kissed his mother tenderly, bidding her good-bye, and pressed Anne Mie's timid little hand warmly between his own. He did what he could to reassure them, but, for their own sakes, he dared say nothing before Merlin, as to his plans for their safety.

After that he was ready to follow the soldiers.

As he passed close to Juliette he bowed, and almost inaudibly whispered:

"Adieu!"

She heard the whisper, but did not respond. Her look alone gave him the reply to his eternal farewell.

His footsteps and those of his escort were heard echoing down the staircase, then the hall door to open and shut. Through the open window came the sound of hoarse cheering as the popular Citizen-Deputy appeared in the street.

Merlin, with two men beside him, remained under the portico; he told off the other two to escort Déroulède as far as the Hall of Justice, where sat the members of the Committee of Public Safety. The Terrorist had a vague fear that the Citizen-Deputy would speak to the mob.

An unruly crowd of women had evidently been awaiting his appearance. The news had quickly spread along the streets that Merlin, Merlin himself, the ardent, bloodthirsty Jacobin, had made a descent upon Paul Déroulède's house, escorted by four soldiers. Such an indignity, put upon the man they most trusted in the entire assembly of the Convention, had greatly incensed the crowd. The women jeered at the soldiers as soon as they appeared, and Merlin dared not actually forbid Déroulède to speak.

"À la lanterne, vieux crétin!" shouted one of the women, thrusting her fist under Merlin's nose.

"Give the word, Citizen-Deputy," rejoined another, "and we'll break his ugly face. Nous lui casserons la gueule!"

"À la lanterne! À la lanterne!"

One word from Déroulède now would have caused an open riot, and in those days self-defence against the mob was construed into enmity against the people.

Merlin's work, too, was not yet accomplished. He had had no intention of escorting Déroulède himself; he had still important business to transact inside the house which he had just quitted, and had merely wished to get the Citizen-Deputy well out of the way before he went upstairs again.

Moreover, he had expected something of a riot in the streets. The temper of the people of Paris was at fever heat just now. The hatred of the populace against a certain class, and against certain individuals, was only equalled by their enthusiasm in favour of others.

They had worshipped Marat for his squalor and his vices; they worshipped Danton for his energy and Robespierre for his calm; they worshipped Déroulède for his voice, his gentleness and his pity, for his care of their children and the eloquence of his speech.

It was that eloquence which Merlin feared now; but he little knew the type of man he had to deal with.

Déroulède's influence over the most unruly, the most vicious populace the history of the world has ever known, was not obtained through fanning its passions. That popularity, though brilliant, is always ephemeral. The passions of a mob will invariably turn against those who have helped to rouse them. Marat did not live to see the waning of his star; Danton was dragged to the guillotine by those whom he had taught to look upon that instrument of death as the only possible and unanswerable political argument; Robespierre succumbed to the orgies of bloodshed he himself had brought about. But Déroulède remained master of the people of Paris for as long as he chose to exert that mastery. When they listened to him they felt better, nobler, less hopelessly degraded.

He kept up in their poor, misguided hearts that last flickering sense of manhood which their bloodthirsty tyrants, under the guise of Fraternity and Equality, were doing their best to smother.

Even now, when he might have turned the temper of the small crowd outside his door to his own advantage, he preferred to say nothing; he even pacified them with a gesture.

He well knew that those whom he incited against Merlin now would, once their blood was up, probably turn against him in less than half an hour.

Merlin, who all along had meant to return to the house, took his opportunity now. He allowed Déroulède and the two men to go on ahead, and beat a hasty retreat back into the house, followed by the jeers of the women.

"À la lanterne, vieux, crétin!" they shouted as soon as the hall door was once more closed in their faces. A few of them began hammering against the door with their fists; then they realized that their special favourite, Citizen-Deputy Déroulède, was marching along between two soldiers, as if he were a prisoner. The word went round that he was under arrest, and was being taken to the Hall of Justice—a prisoner.

This was not to be. The mob of Paris had been taught that it was the master in the city, and it had learned its lesson well. For the moment it had chosen to take Paul Déroulède under its special protection, and as a guard of honour to him—the women in ragged kirtles, the men with bare legs and stripped to the waist, the children all yelling, hooting, and shrieking—followed him, to see that none dared harm him.

17

ATONEMENT

MERLIN waited a while in the hall, until he heard the noise of the shrieking crowd gradually die away in the distance, then with a grunt of satisfaction he once more mounted the stairs.

All these events outside had occurred during a very few minutes, and Madame Déroulède and Anne Mie had been too anxious as to what was happening in the streets, to take any notice of Juliette.

They had not dared to step out on to the balcony to see what was going on, and, therefore, did not understand what the reopening and shutting of the front door had meant.

The next instant, however, Merlin's heavy, slouching footsteps on the stairs had caused Anne Mie to look round in alarm.

"It is only the soldiers come back for me," said Juliette quietly.

"For you?"

"Yes; they are coming to take me away. I suppose they did not wish to do it in the presence of M. Déroulède, for fear——"

She had no time to say more. Anne Mie was still looking at her in awed and mute surprise, when Merlin entered the room.

In his hand he held a leather case, all torn, and split at one end, and a few tiny scraps of half-charred paper. He walked straight up to Juliette, and roughly thrust the case and papers into her face.

"These are yours?" he said roughly.

"Yes."

"I suppose you know where they were found?"

She nodded quietly in reply.

"What were these papers which you burnt?"

"Love-letters."

"You lie!"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"As you please," she said curtly.

"What were these papers?" he repeated, with a loud obscene oath which, however, had not the power to disturb the young girl's serenity.

"I have told you," she said; "love-letters, which I wished to burn."

"Who was your lover?" he asked.

Then as she did not reply he indicated the street, where cries of "Déroulède! Vive Déroulède!" still echoed from afar.

"Were the letters from him?"

"No."

"You had more than one lover, then?"

He laughed, and a hideous leer seemed further to distort his ugly countenance.

He thrust his face quite close to hers, and she closed her eyes, sick with the horror of this contact with the degraded wretch. Even Anne Mie had uttered a cry of sympathy at sight of this evil-smelling, squalid creature torturing, with his close proximity, the beautiful, refined girl before him.

With a rough gesture he put his clawlike hand under her delicate chin, forcing her to turn round and to look at him. She shuddered at the loathsome touch, but her quietude never forsook her for a moment.

It was into the power of wretches such as this man that she had wilfully delivered the man she loved. This brutish creature's familiarity put the finishing touch to her own degradation, but it gave her the courage to carry through her purpose to the end.

"You had more than one lover, then?" said Merlin, with a laugh which would have pleased the devil himself. "And you wished to send one of them to the guillotine in order to make way for the other? Was that it?"

"Was that it?" he repeated, suddenly seizing one of her wrists, and giving it a savage twist, so that she almost screamed with the pain.

"Yes," she replied firmly.

"Do you know that you brought me here on a fool's errand?" he asked viciously; "that the Citizen-Deputy Déroulède cannot be sent to the guillotine on mere suspicion, eh? Did you know that, when you wrote out that denunciation?"

"No; I did not know."

"You thought we could arrest him on mere suspicion?"

"Yes."

"You knew he was innocent?"

"I knew it."

"Why did you burn your love-letters?"

"I was afraid that they would be found, and would be brought under the notice of the Citizen-Deputy."

"A splendid combination, ma foi!" said Merlin, with an oath, as he turned to the two other women, who sat pale and shrinking in a corner of the room, not understanding what was going on, not knowing what to think or what to believe. They had known nothing of Déroulède's plans for the escape of Marie Antoinette, they didn't know what the letter-case had contained, and yet they both vaguely felt that the beautiful girl, who stood up so calmly before the loathsome Terrorist, was not a wanton, as she tried to make out, but only misguided, mad perhaps—perhaps a martyr.

"Did you know anything of this?" queried Merlin roughly from trembling Anne Mie.

"Nothing," she replied.

"No one knew anything of my private affairs or of my private correspondence," said Juliette coldly; "as you say, it was a splendid combination. I had hoped that it would succeed. But I understand now that Citizen-Deputy Déroulède is a personage of too much importance to be brought to trial on mere suspicion, and my denunciation of him was not based on facts."

"And do you know, my fine aristocrat," sneered Merlin viciously, "that it is not wise either to fool the Committee of Public Safety, or to denounce without cause one of the representatives of the people?"

"I know," she rejoined quietly, "that you, Citizen Merlin, are determined that some one shall pay for this day's blunder. You dare not now attack the Citizen-Deputy, and so you must be content with me."

"Enough of this talk now; I have no time to bandy words with aristos," he said roughly. "Come now, follow the men quietly. Resistance would only aggravate your case."

"I am quite prepared to follow you. May I speak two words to my friends before I go?"

"No."

"I may never be able to speak to them again."

"I have said No, and I mean No. Now then, forward. March! I have wasted too much time already."

Juliette was too proud to insist any further. She had hoped, by one word, to soften Madame Déroulède's and Anne Mie's heart towards her. She did not know whether they believed that miserable lie which she had been telling to Merlin; she only guessed that for the moment they still thought her the betrayer of Paul Déroulède.

But that one word was not to be spoken. She would have to go forth to her certain trial, to her probable death, under the awful cloud, which she herself had brought over her own life.

She turned quietly, and walked towards the door, where the two men already stood at attention.

Then it was that some heaven-born instinct seemed suddenly to guide Anne Mie. The crippled girl was face to face with a psychological problem, which in itself was far beyond her comprehension, but vaguely she felt that it was a problem. Something in Juliette's face had already caused her to bitterly repent her action towards her, and now, as this beautiful, refined woman was about to pass from under the shelter of this roof, to the cruel publicity and terrible torture of that awful revolutionary tribunal, Anne Mie's whole heart went out to her in boundless sympathy.

Before Merlin or the men could prevent her, she had run up to Juliette, taken her hand, which hung listless and cold, and kissed it tenderly.

Juliette seemed to wake as if from a dream. She looked down at Anne Mie with a glance of hope, almost of joy, and whispered:

"It was an oath—I swore it to my father and my dead brother. Tell him."

Anne Mie could only nod; she could not speak, for her tears were choking her.

"But I'll atone—with my life. Tell him," whispered Juliette.

"Now then," shouted Merlin, "out of the way, hunchback, unless you want to come along too."

"Forgive me," said Anne Mie through her tears.

Then the men pushed her roughly aside. But at the door Juliette turned to her once more, and said:

"Pétronelle—take care of her——"

And with a firm step she followed the soldiers out of the room.

Presently the front door was heard to open, then to shut with a loud bang, and the house in the Rue Ecole de Médecine was left in silence.

18

IN THE LUXEMBOURG PRISON

Juliette was alone at last—that is to say, comparatively alone, for there were too many aristocrats, too many criminals and traitors, in the prisons of Paris now, to allow of any seclusion for those who were about to be tried, condemned, and guillotined.

The young girl had been marched through the crowded streets of Paris, followed by a jeering mob, who readily recognized in the gentle, high-bred girl the obvious prey, which the Committee of Public Safety was wont, from time to time, to throw to the hungry, hydra-headed dog of the Revolution.

Lately the squalid spectators of the noisome spectacle on the Place de la Guillotine had had few of these very welcome sights; an aristocrat—a real, elegant, refined woman, with white hands and proud, pale face—mounting the steps of the same scaffold on which perished the vilest criminals and most degraded brutes.

Madame Guillotine was, above all, catholic in her tastes, her gaunt arms, painted blood red, were open alike to the murderer and the thief, the aristocrats of ancient lineage, and the proletariat from the gutter.

But lately the executions had been almost exclusively of a political character. The Girondins were fighting their last upon the bloody arena of the Revolution. One by one they fell still fighting, still preaching moderation, still foretelling disaster and appealing to that people, whom they had roused from one slavery, in order to throw it headlong under a tyrannical yoke more brutish, more absolute than before.

There were twelve prisons in Paris then, and forty thousand in France, and they were all full. An entire army went round the country recruiting prisoners. There was no room for separate cells, no room for privacy, no cause or desire for the most elementary sense of delicacy.

Women, men, children—all were herded together, for one day, perhaps two, and a night or so, and then death would obliterate the petty annoyances, the womanly blushes caused by this sordid propinquity.

Death levelled all, erased everything.

When Marie Antoinette mounted the guillotine she had forgotten that for six weeks she practically lived day and night in the immediate companionship of a set of degraded soldiery.

Juliette, as she marched through the streets between two men of the National Guard, and followed by Merlin, was hooted and jeered at, insulted, pelted with mud. One woman tried to push past the soldiers, and to strike her in the face—a woman! not thirty! —and who was dragging a pale, squalid little boy by the hand.

"Crache donc sur l'aristo, voyons!" the woman said to this poor, miserable little scrap of humanity as the soldiers pushed her roughly aside. "Spit on the aristocrat!" And the child tortured its own small, parched mouth so that, in obedience to its mother, it might defile and bespatter a beautiful, innocent girl.

The soldiers laughed, and improved the occasion with another insulting jest. Even Merlin forgot his vexation, delighted at the incident.

But Juliette had seen nothing of it all.

She was walking as in a dream. The mob did not exist for her; she heard neither insult nor vituperation. She did not see the evil, dirty faces pushed now and then quite close to her; she did not feel the rough hands of the soldiers jostling her through the crowd: she had gone back to her own world of romance, where she dwelt alone now with the man she loved. Instead of the squalid houses of Paris, with their eternal device of Fraternity and Equality, there were beautiful trees and shrubs of laurel and of roses around her, making the air fragrant with their soft, intoxicating perfumes; sweet voices from the land of dreams filled the atmosphere with their tender murmur, whilst overhead a cloudless sky illumined this earthly paradise.

She was happy—supremely, completely happy.

She had saved him from the consequences of her own iniquitous crime, and she was about to give her life for him, so that his safety might be more completely assured.

Her love for him he would never know; now he knew only her crime, but presently, when she would be convicted and condemned, confronted with a few scraps of burned paper and a torn letter-case, then he would know that she had stood her trial, self-accused, and meant to die for him.

Therefore the past few moments were now wholly hers. She had the right to dwell on those few happy seconds when she listened to the avowal of his love. It was ethereal, and perhaps not altogether human, but it was hers. She had been his divinity, his madonna; he had loved in her that which was her truer, her better self.

What was base in her was not truly her. That awful oath, sworn so solemnly, had been her relentless tyrant; and her religion—religion of superstition and of false ideals—had blinded her, and dragged her into crime.

She had arrogated to herself that which was God's alone—"Vengeance!" which is not for man.

That through it all she should have known love, and learned its tender secrets, was more than she deserved. That she should have felt his burning kisses on her hand was heavenly compensation for all she would have to suffer.

And so she allowed them to drag her through the sansculotte mob of Paris, who would have torn her to pieces then and there, so as not to delay the pleasure of seeing her die.

They took her to the Luxembourg, once the palace of the Medici, the home of proud "Monsieur" in the days of the Great Monarch, now a loathsome, overfilled prison.

It was then six o'clock in the afternoon, drawing towards the close of this memorable day. She was handed over to the governor of the prison, a short, thick-set man in black trousers and black-shag woollen shirt, and wearing a dirty red cap, with tricolour rosette on the side of his unkempt head.

He eyed her up and down as she passed under the narrow doorway, then murmured one swift query to Merlin:

"Dangerous?"

"Yes," replied Merlin laconically.

"You understand," added the governor; "we are so crowded. We ought to know if individual attention is required."

"Certainly," said Merlin, "you will be personally responsible for this prisoner to the Committee of Public Safety."

"Any visitors allowed?"

"Certainly not, without the special permission of the Public Prosecutor."

Juliette heard this brief exchange of words over her future fate.

No visitor would be allowed to see her. Well, perhaps that would be best. She would have been afraid to meet Déroulède again, afraid to read in his eyes that story of his dead love, which alone might have destroyed her present happiness.

And she wished to see no one. She had a memory to dwell on—a short, heavenly memory. It consisted of a few words, a kiss—the last one—on her hand, and that passionate murmur which had escaped from his lips when he knelt at her feet:

"Juliette!"

19

COMPLEXITIES

Citizen-Deputy Déroulède had been privately interviewed by the Committee of Public Safety, and temporarily allowed to go free.

The brief proceedings had been quite private, the people of Paris were not to know as yet that their favourite was under a cloud. When he had answered all the questions put to him, and Merlin—just returned from his errand at the Luxembourg Prison—had given his version of the domiciliary visitation in the Citizen-Deputy's house, the latter was briefly told that for the moment the Republic had no grievance against him.

But he knew quite well what that meant. He would be henceforth under suspicion, watched incessantly, as a mouse is by the cat, and pounced upon the moment time would be considered propitious for his final downfall.

The inevitable waning of his popularity would be noted by keen, jealous eyes; and Déroulède, with his sure knowledge of mankind and of character, knew well enough that his popularity was bound to wane sooner or later, as all such ephemeral things do.

In the meanwhile, during the short respite which his enemies would leave him, his one thought and duty would be to get his mother and Anne Mie safely out of the country.

And also——

He thought of *her*, and wondered what had happened. As he walked swiftly across the narrow footbridge, and reached the other side of the river, the events of the past few hours rushed upon his memory with terrible, overwhelming force.

A bitter ache filled his heart at the remembrance of her treachery. The baseness of it all was so appalling. He tried to think if he had ever wronged her; wondered if perhaps she loved some one else, and wished *him* out of her way.

But then, he had been so humble, so unassuming in his love. He had arrogated nothing unto himself, asked for nothing, demanded nothing in virtue of his protecting powers over her.

He was torturing himself with this awful wonderment of why she had treated him thus.

Out of revenge for her brother's death—that was the only explanation he could find, the only palliation for her crime.

He knew nothing of her oath to her father, and, of course, had never heard of the sad history of this young, sensitive girl placed in one terrible moment between her dead brother and her demented father. He only thought of common, sordid revenge for a sin he had been practically forced to commit.

And how he had loved her!

Yes, *loved*—for that was in the past now. She had ceased to be a saint or a madonna; she had fallen from her pedestal so low that he could not find the way to descend and grope after the fragments of his ideal.

At his own door he was met by Anne Mie in tears.

"She has gone," murmured the young girl. "I feel as if I had murdered her."

"Gone? Who? Where?" queried Déroulède rapidly, an icy feeling of terror gripping him by the heartstrings.

"Juliette has gone," replied Anne Mie; "those awful brutes took her away."

"When?"

"Directly after you left. That man Merlin found some ashes and scraps of paper in her room——"

"Ashes?"

"Yes; and a torn letter-case."

"Great God!"

"She said that they were love-letters, which she had been burning for fear you should see them."

"She said so? Anne Mie, Anne Mie, are you quite sure?"

It was all so horrible, and he did not quite understand it all; his brain, which was usually so keen and so active, refused him service at this terrible juncture.

"Yes; I am quite sure," continued Anne Mie, in the midst of her tears. "And oh! that awful Merlin said some dastardly things. But she persisted in her story, that she had—another lover. Oh, Paul, I am sure it is not true. I hated her because—because—you loved her so, and I mistrusted her, but I cannot believe that she was quite as base as that."

"No, no, child," he said in a toneless, miserable voice; "she was not so base as that. Tell me more of what she said."

"She said very little else. But Merlin asked her whether she had denounced you so as to get you out of the way. He hinted that—that——"

"That I was her lover too?"

"Yes," murmured Anne Mie.

She hardly liked to look at him; the strong face had become hard and set in its misery.

"And she allowed them to say all this?" he asked at last.

"Yes. And she followed them without a murmur, as Merlin said she would have to answer before the Committee of Public Safety, for having fooled the representatives of the people."

"She'll answer for it with her life," murmured Déroulède. "And with mine!" he added half audibly.

Anne Mie did not hear him; her pathetic little soul was filled with a great, an overwhelming pity for Juliette and for Paul.

"Before they took her away," she said, placing her thin, delicate-looking hands on his arm, "I ran to her, and bade her farewell. The soldiers pushed me roughly aside; but I contrived to kiss her—and then she whispered a few words to me."

"Yes? What were they?"

"'It was an oath,' she said. 'I swore it to my father and to my dead brother. Tell him,'" repeated Anne Mie slowly.

An oath!

Now he understood, and oh! how he pitied her. How terribly she must have suffered in her poor, harassed soul when her noble, upright nature fought against this hideous treachery.

That she was true and brave in herself, of that Déroulède had no doubt. And now this awful sin upon her conscience, which must be causing her endless misery.

And, alas! the atonement would never free her from the load of self-condemnation.

She had elected to pay with her life for her treason against him and his family. She would be arraigned before a tribunal which would inevitably condemn her. Oh! the pity of it all!

One moment's passionate emotion, a lifelong superstition and mistaken sense of duty, and now this endless misery, this terrible atonement of a wrong that could never be undone.

And she had never loved him!

That was the true, the only sting which he knew now; it rankled more than her sin, more than her falsehood, more than the shattering of his ideal.

With a passionate desire for his safety, she had sacrificed herself in order to atone for the material evil which she had done.

But there was the wreck of his hopes and of his dreams!

Never until now, when he had irretrievably lost her, did Déroulède realize how great had been his hopes; how he had watched day after day for a look in her eyes, a word from her lips, to show him that she too—his unattainable saint—would one day come to earth, and respond to his love.

And now and then, when her beautiful face lighted up at the sight of him, when she smiled a greeting to him on his return from his work, when she looked with pride and admiration on him from the public bench in the assemblies of the Convention—then he had begun to hope, to think, to dream.

And it was all a sham! A mask to hide the terrible conflict that was raging within her soul, nothing more.

She did not love him, of that he felt convinced. Man-like, he did not understand to the full that great and wonderful enigma, which has puzzled the world since primeval times: a woman's heart.

The eternal contradictions which go to make up the complex nature of an emotional woman were quite incomprehensible to him. Juliette had betrayed him to serve her own sense of what was just and right, her revenge and her oath. Therefore she did not love him.

It was logic, sound common-sense, and, aided by his own diffidence where women were concerned, it seemed to him irrefutable.

To a man like Paul Déroulède, a man of thought, of purpose, and of action, the idea of being false to the thing loved, of hate and love being interchangeable, was absolutely foreign and unbelievable. He had never hated the thing he loved or loved the thing he hated. A man's feelings in these respects are so much less complex, so much less contradictory.

Would a man betray his friend? No—never. He might betray his enemy, the creature he abhorred, whose downfall would cause him joy. But his friend? The very idea was repugnant, impossible to an upright nature.

Juliette's ultimate access of generosity in trying to save him, when she was at last brought face to face with the terrible wrong she had committed, *that* he put down to one of those noble impulses of which he knew her soul to be fully capable, and even then his own diffidence suggested that she did it more for the sake of his mother or for Anne Mie rather than for him.

Therefore what mattered life to him now? She was lost to him for ever, whether he succeeded in snatching her from the guillotine or not. He had but little hope to save her, but he would not owe his life to her.

Anne Mie, seeing him wrapped in his own thoughts, had quietly withdrawn. Her own good sense told her already that Paul Déroulède's first step would be to try and get his mother out of danger, and out of the country, while there was yet time.

So, without waiting for instructions, she began that same evening to pack up her belongings and those of Madame Déroulède.

There was no longer any hatred in her heart against Juliette. Where Paul Déroulède had failed to understand, there Anne Mie had already made a guess.

She firmly believed that nothing now could save Juliette from death, and a great feeling of tenderness had crept into her heart for the woman whom she had looked upon as an enemy and a rival.

She too had learnt in those brief days the great lesson that revenge belongs to God alone.

20

THE CHEVAL BORGNE

It was close upon midnight.

The place had become suffocatingly hot; the fumes of rank tobacco, of rancid butter, and of raw spirits hung like a vapour in mid-air.

The principal room in the "Auberge du Cheval Borgne" had been used for the past five years now as the chief meeting-place of the ultra-sansculotte party of the Republic.

The house itself was squalid and dirty, up one of those mean streets which, by their narrow way and shelving buildings, shut out sun, air, and light from their miserable inhabitants.

The Cheval Borgne was one of the most wretched-looking dwellings in this street of evil repute. The plaster was cracked, the walls themselves seemed bulging outward, preparatory to a final collapse. The ceilings were low, and supported by beams black with age and dirt.

At one time it had been celebrated for its vast cellarage, which had contained some rare old wines. And in the days of the Grand Monarch young bucks were wont to quit the gay salons of the ladies, in order to repair to the Cheval Borgne for a night's carouse.

In those days the vast cellarage was witness of many a dark encounter, of many a mysterious death; could the slimy walls have told their own tale, it would have been one which would have put to shame the wildest chronicles of M. Vidocq.

Now it was no longer so.

Things were done in broad daylight on the Place de la Révolution: there was no need for dark, mysterious cellars, in which to accomplish deeds of murder and of revenge.

Rats and vermin of all sorts worked their way now in the underground portion of the building. They ate up each other, and held their orgies in the cellars, whilst men did the same sort of thing in the rooms above.

It was a club of Equality and Fraternity. Any passer-by was at liberty to enter and take part in the debates, his only qualification for this temporary membership being an inordinate love for Madame la Guillotine.

It was from the sordid rooms of the Cheval Borgne that most of the denunciations had gone forth which led but to the one inevitable ending—death.

They sat in conclave here, some twoscore or so at first, the rabid patriots of this poor, downtrodden France. They talked of Liberty mostly, with many oaths and curses against the tyrants, and then started a tyranny, an autocracy, ten thousand times more awful than any wielded by the dissolute Bourbons.

And this was the temple of Liberty, this dark, damp, evil-smelling brothel, with its narrow, cracked window-panes, which let in but an infinitesimal fraction of air, and that of the foulest, most unwholesome kind.

The floor was of planks roughly put together; now they were worm-eaten, bare, save for a thick carpet of greasy dust, which deadened the sound of booted feet. The place only boasted of a couple of chairs, both of which had to be propped against the wall lest they should break, and bring the sitter down upon the floor; otherwise a number of empty wine barrels did duty for seats, and rough deal boards on broken trestles for tables.

There had once been a paper on the walls, now it hung down in strips, showing the cracked plaster beneath. The whole place had a tone of yellowish-grey grime all over it, save where, in the centre of the room, on a rough double post, shaped like the guillotine, a scarlet cap of Liberty gave a note of lurid colour to the dismal surroundings.

On the walls here and there the eternal device, so sublime in conception, so sordid in execution, recalled the aims of the so-called club: "Liberté, Fraternité, Egalité, sinon la Mort."

Below the device, in one or two corners of the room, the wall was further adorned with rough charcoal sketches, mostly of an obscene character, the work of one of the members of the club, who had chosen this means of degrading his art.

To-night the assembly had been reduced to less than a score.

Even according to the dictates of these apostles of Fraternity: "*la guillotine va toujours*"—the guillotine goes on always. She had become the most potent factor in the machinery of government, of this great Revolution, and she had been daily, almost hourly fed through the activity of this nameless club, which held its weird and awesome sittings in the dank coffee-room of the Cheval Borgne.

The number of the active members had been reduced. Like the rats in the cellars below, they had done away with one another, swallowed one another up, torn each other to pieces in this wild rage for a Utopian fraternity.

Marat, founder of the organization, had been murdered by a girl's hand; but Chardon, Manuel, Osselin had gone the usual way, denounced by their colleagues, Rabaut, Custine, Bison, who in their turn were sent to the guillotine by those more powerful, perhaps more eloquent, than themselves.

It was merely a case of who could shout the loudest at an assembly of the National Convention.

"*La guillotine va toujours!*"

After the death of Marat, Merlin became the most prominent member of the club—he and Foucquier-Tinville, his bosom friend, Public Prosecutor, and the most bloodthirsty homicide of this homicidal age.

Bosom friends both, yet they worked against one another, undermining each other's popularity, whispering persistently, one against the other: "He is a traitor!" It had become just a neck-to-neck race between them towards the inevitable goal—the guillotine.

Foucquier-Tinville is in the ascendant for the moment. Merlin had been given a task which he had failed to accomplish. For days now, weeks even, the debates of this noble assembly had been chiefly concerned with the downfall of Citizen-Deputy Déroulède. His popularity, his calm security in the midst of this reign of terror and anarchy, had been a terrible thorn in the flesh of these rabid Jacobins.

And now the climax had been reached. An anonymous denunciation had roused the hopes of these sanguinary patriots. It all sounded perfectly plausible. To try and save that traitor, Marie Antoinette, the widow of Louis Capet, was just the sort of scheme that would originate in the brain of Paul Déroulède.

He had always been at heart an aristocrat, and the feeling of chivalry for a persecuted woman was only the outward signs of his secret adherence to the hated class.

Merlin had been sent to search the Deputy's house for proofs of the latter's guilt.

And Merlin had come back empty-handed.

The arrest of a female aristo—the probable mistress of Déroulède, who obviously had denounced him—was but small compensation for the failure of the more important capture.

As soon as Merlin joined his friends in the low, ill-lit, evil-smelling room he realized at once that there was a feeling of hostility against him.

Tinville, enthroned on one of the few chairs of which the Cheval Borgne could boast, was surrounded by a group of surly adherents.

On the rough trestles a number of glasses, half filled with raw potato-spirit, gave the keynote to the temper of the assembly.

All those present were dressed in the black-shag spencer, the seedy black breeches, and down-at-heel boots, which had become recognized as the distinctive uniform of the sansculotte party. The inevitable Phrygian cap, with its tricolour cockade, appeared on the heads of all those present, in various stages of dirt and decay.

Tinville had chosen to assume a sarcastic tone with regard to his whilom bosom friend, Merlin. Leaning both elbows on the table, he was picking his teeth with a steel fork, and in the intervals of this interesting operation, gave forth his views on the broad principles of patriotism.

Those who sat round him felt that his star was in the ascendant, and assumed the position of satellites. Merlin, as he entered, had grunted a sullen "Good-eve," and sat himself down in a remote corner of the room.

His greeting had been responded to with a few jeers and a good many dark, threatening looks. Tinville himself had bowed to him with mock sarcasm and an unpleasant leer.

One of the patriots, a huge fellow, almost a giant, with heavy, coarse fists and broad shoulders that obviously suggested coal-heaving, had, after a few satirical observations, dragged one of the empty wine barrels to Merlin's table, and sat down opposite him.

"Take care, Citizen Lenoir," said Tinville, with an evil laugh, "Citizen-Deputy Merlin will arrest you instead of Deputy Déroulède, whom he has allowed to slip through his fingers."

"Nay; I've no fear," replied Lenoir, with an oath. "Citizen Merlin is too much of an aristo to hurt anyone; his hands are too clean; he does not care to do the dirty work of the Republic. Isn't that so, Monsieur Merlin?" added the giant, with a mock bow, and emphasizing the appellation which had fallen into complete disuse in these days of equality.

"My patriotism is too well known," said Merlin roughly, "to fear any attacks from jealous enemies; and as for my search in the Citizen-Deputy's house this afternoon, I was told to find proofs against him, and I found none."

Lenoir expectorated on the floor, crossed his dark hairy arms over the table, and said quietly:

"Real patriotism, as the true Jacobin understands it, makes the proofs it wants and leaves nothing to chance."

A chorus of hoarse murmurs of "Vive la Liberté!" greeted this harangue of the burly coal-heaver.

Feeling that he had gained the ear and approval of the gallery, Lenoir seemed, as it were, to spread himself out, to arrogate to himself the leadership of this band of malcontents, who, disappointed in their lust for Déroulède's downfall, were ready to exult over that of Merlin.

"You were a fool, Citizen Merlin," said Lenoir with slow significance, "not to see that the woman was playing her own game."

Merlin had become livid under the grime on his face. With this ill-kempt sansculotte giant in front of him, he almost felt as if he were already arraigned before that awful, merciless tribunal, to which he had dragged so many innocent victims.

Already he felt, as he sat ensconced behind a table in the far corner of the room, that he was a prisoner at the bar, answering for his failure with his life.

His own laws, his own theories now stood in bloody array against him. Was it not he who had framed the indictments against General Custine for having failed to subdue the cities of the south? against General Westerman and Brunet and Beauharnais far having failed and failed and failed?

And now it was his turn.

These bloodthirsty jackals had been cheated of their prey; they would tear him to pieces in compensation for their loss.

"How could I tell?" he murmured roughly, "the woman had denounced him."

A chorus of angry derision greeted this feeble attempt at defence.

"By your own law, Citizen-Deputy Merlin," commented Tinville sarcastically, "it is a crime against the Republic to be suspected of treason. It is evident, however, that it is quite one thing to frame a law and quite another to obey it."

"What could I have done?"

"Hark at the innocent!" rejoined Lenoir, with a sneer. "What could he have done? Patriots, friends, brothers, I ask you, what could he have done?"

The giant had pushed the wine cask aside, it rolled away from under him, and in the fullness of his contempt for Merlin and his importance, he stood up before them all, strong in his indictment against treasonable incapacity.

"I ask you," he repeated, with a loud oath, "what any patriot would do, what you or I would have done, in the house of a man whom we all *know* is a traitor to the Republic? Brothers, friends, Citizen-Deputy Merlin found a heap of burnt paper in a grate, he found a letter-case which had obviously contained important documents, and he asks us what he could do!"

"Déroulède is too important a man to be tried without proofs. The whole mob of Paris would have turned on us for having arraigned him, for having dared lay hands upon his sacred person."

"Without proofs? Who said there were no proofs?" queried Lenoir.

"I found the burnt papers and torn letter-case in the woman's room. She owned that they were love-letters, and that she had denounced Déroulède in order to be rid of him."

"Then let me tell you, Citizen-Deputy Merlin, that a true patriot would have found those papers in Déroulède's, and not the woman's room; that in the hands of a faithful servant of the Republic those documents would not all have been destroyed, for he would have 'found' one letter addressed to the Widow Capet, which would have proved conclusively that Citizen-Deputy Déroulède was a traitor. That is what a true patriot would have done—what I would have done. Pardi! since Déroulède is so important a personage, since we must all put on kid gloves when we lay hands upon him, then let us fight him with other weapons. Are we aristocrats that we should hesitate to play the part of jackal to this cunning fox? Citizen-Deputy Merlin, are you the son of some ci-devant duke or prince that you dared not *forge* a document which would bring a traitor to his doom? Nay, let me tell you, friends, that the Republic has no use for curs, and calls him a traitor who allows one of her enemies to remain inviolate through his cowardice, his terror of that intangible and fleeting shadow—the wrath of a Paris mob."

Thunderous applause greeted this peroration, which had been delivered with an accompaniment of violent gesture and a wealth of obscene epithets, quite beyond the power of the mere chronicler to render. Lenoir had a harsh, strident voice, very high pitched, and he spoke with a broad provincial accent, somewhat difficult to locate, but quite unlike the hoarse, gutteral tones of the low-class Parisian. His enthusiasm made him seem impressive. He looked, in his ragged, dust-stained clothes, the very personification of the squalid herd which had driven culture, art, refinement to the scaffold in order to make way for sordid vice, and satisfied lusts of hate.

21

A JACOBIN ORATOR

Tinville alone had remained silent during Lenoir's impassioned speech. It seemed to be his turn now to become surly. He sat picking his teeth, and staring moodily at the enthusiastic orator, who had so obviously diverted popular feeling in his own direction. And Tinville brooked popularity only for himself.

"It is easy to talk now, Citizen—er—Lenoir. Is that your name? Well, you are a comparative stranger here, Citizen Lenoir, and have not yet proved to the Republic that you can do aught else but talk."

"If somebody did not talk, Citizen Tinville—is that your name?" rejoined Lenoir, with a sneer—"if somebody didn't talk, nothing would get done. You all sit here, and condemn the Citizen-Deputy Merlin for being a fool, and I must say I am with you there, but——"

"Pardi! tell us your 'but,' citizen," said Tinville, for the coal-heaver had paused, as if trying to collect his thoughts. He had dragged a wine barrel close to the trestle table, and now sat astride upon it, facing Tinville and the group of Jacobins. The flickering tallow candle behind him threw into bold silhouette his square, massive head, crowned with its Phrygian cap, and the great breadth of his shoulders, with the shabby knitted spencer and low, turned-down collar.

He had long, thin hands, which were covered with successive coats of coal-dust, and with these he constantly made weird gestures, as if in the act of gripping some live thing by the throat.

"We all know that the Deputy Déroulède is a traitor, eh?" he said, addressing the company in general.

"We do," came with uniform assent from all those present.

"Then let us put it to the vote. The Ayes mean death, the Noes freedom."

"Ay, ay!" came from every hoarse, parched throat; and twelve gaunt hands were lifted up demanding death for Citizen-Deputy Déroulède.

"The Ayes have it," said Lenoir quietly. "Now all we need do is to decide how best to carry out our purpose."

Merlin, very agreeably surprised to see public attention thus diverted from his own misdeeds, had gradually lost his surly attitude. He too dragged one of the wine barrels, which did duty for chairs, close to the trestle table, and thus the members of the nameless Jacobin club made a compact group picturesque in its weird horror, its uncompromising, flaunting ugliness.

"I suppose," said Tinville, who was loath to give up his position as leader of these extremists—"I suppose, Citizen Lenoir, that you are in a position to furnish me with proofs of the Citizen-Deputy's guilt?"

"If I furnish you with such proofs, Citizen Tinville," retorted the other, "will you, as Public Prosecutor, carry the indictment through?"

"It is my duty to publicly accuse those who are traitors to the Republic."

"And you, Citizen Merlin," queried Lenoir, "will you help the Republic to the best of your ability to be rid of a traitor?"

"My services to the cause of our great Revolution are too well known——" began Merlin.

But Lenoir interrupted him with impatience.

"Pardi! but we'll have no rhetoric now, Citizen Merlin. We all know that you have blundered, and that the Republic cares little for those of her sons who have failed, but whilst you are still Minister of Justice the people of France have need of you—for bringing *other* traitors to the guillotine."

He spoke this last phrase slowly and significantly, lingering on the word "other," as if he wished its whole awesome meaning to penetrate well into Merlin's brain.

"What is your advice then, Citizen Lenoir?"

Apparently, by unanimous consent, the coal-heaver, from some obscure province of France, had been tacitly acknowledged the leader of the band. Merlin, still in terror for himself, looked to him for advice; even Tinville was ready to be guided by him. All were at one in their desire to rid themselves of Déroulède, who by his clean living, his aloofness from their own hideous orgies and deadly hates, seemed a living reproach to them all; and they all felt that in Lenoir there must exist some secret dislike of the popular Citizen-Deputy, which would give him a clear insight of how best to bring about his downfall.

"What is your advice?" had been Merlin's query, and every one there listened eagerly for what was to come.

"We are all agreed," commenced Lenoir quietly, "that just at this moment it would be unwise to arraign the Citizen-Deputy without material proof. The mob of Paris worship him, and would turn against those who had tried to dethrone their idol. Now, Citizen Merlin failed to furnish us with proofs of Déroulède's guilt. For the moment he is a free man, and I imagine a wise one; within two days he will have quitted this country, well knowing that, if he stayed long enough to see his popularity wane, he would also outstay his welcome on earth altogether."

"Ay! Ay!" said some of the men approvingly, whilst others laughed hoarsely at the weird jest.

"I propose, therefore," continued Lenoir, after a slight pause, "that it shall be Citizen-Deputy Déroulède himself who shall furnish to the people of France proofs of his own treason against the Republic."

"But how? But how?" rapid, loud and excited queries greeted this extraordinary suggestion from the provincial giant.

"By the simplest means imaginable," retorted Lenoir with imperturbable calm. "Isn't there a good proverb which our grandmothers used to quote, that if you only give a man a sufficient length of rope, he is sure to hang himself? We'll give our aristocratic Citizen-Deputy plenty of rope, I'll warrant, if only our present Minister of Justice," he added, indicating Merlin, "will help us in the little comedy which I propose that we should play."

"Yes! Yes! Go on!" said Merlin excitedly.

"The woman who denounced Déroulède—that is our trump card," continued Lenoir, now waxing enthusiastic with his own scheme and his own eloquence. "She denounced him. Ergo, he had been her lover, whom she wished to be rid of—why? Not, as Citizen Merlin supposed, because he had discarded her. No, no; she had another lover—she has admitted that. She wished to be rid of Déroulède to make way for the other, because he was too persistent—ergo, because he loved her."

"Well, and what does that prove?" queried Tinville with dry sarcasm.

"It proves that Déroulède, being in love with the woman, would do much to save her from the guillotine."

"Of course."

"Pardi! let him try, say I," rejoined Lenoir placidly. "Give him the rope with which to hang himself."

"What does he mean?" asked one or two of the men, whose dull brains had not quite as yet grasped the full meaning of this monstrous scheme.

"You don't understand what I mean, citizens; you think I am mad, or drunk, or a traitor like Déroulède? Eh, bien! give me your attention five minutes longer, and you shall see. Let me suppose that we have reached the moment when the woman—what is her name? Oh! ah! yes! Juliette Marny—stands in the Hall of Justice on her trial before the Committee of Public Safety. Citizen Foucquier-Tinville, one of our greatest patriots, reads the indictment against her: the papers surreptitiously burnt, the torn, mysterious letter-case found in her room. If these are presumed, in the indictment, to be treasonable correspondence with the enemies of the Republic, condemnation follows at once, then the guillotine. There is no defence, no respite. The Minister of Justice, according to Article IX of the Law framed by himself, allows no advocate to those directly accused of treason. But," continued the giant, with slow and calm impressiveness, "in the case of ordinary, civil indictments, offences against public morality or matters pertaining to the penal code, the Minister of Justice allows the accused to be publicly defended. Place Juliette Marny in the dock on a treasonable charge, she will be hustled out of the court in a few minutes, amongst a batch of other traitors, dragged back to her own prison, and executed in the early dawn, before Déroulède has had time to frame a plan for her safety or defence. If, then, he tries to move heaven and earth to rescue the woman he loves, the mob of Paris may—who knows?—take his part warmly. They are mad where Déroulède is concerned; and we all know that two devoted lovers have ere now found favour with the people of France—a curious remnant of sentimentalism, I suppose—and the popular Citizen-Deputy knows better than anyone else on earth how to play upon the sentimental feelings of the populace. Now, in the case of a penal offence, mark where the difference would be! The woman Juliette Marny, arraigned for wantonness, for an offence against public morals; the burnt correspondence, admitted to be the letters of a lover—her hatred for Déroulède suggesting the false denunciation. Then the Minister of Justice allows an advocate to defend her. She has none in court; but think you Déroulède would not step forward and bring all the fervour of his eloquence to bear in favour of his mistress? Can you hear his impassioned speech on her behalf?—I can—the rope, I tell you, citizens, with which he'll hang himself. Will he admit in open court that the burnt correspondence was another lover's letters? No!—a thousand times no!—and, in the face of his emphatic denial of the existence of another lover for Juliette, it will be for our clever Public Prosecutor to bring him down to an admission that the correspondence was his, that it was treasonable, that she burnt them to save him."

He paused, exhausted at last, mopping his forehead, then drinking large gulps of brandy to ease his parched throat.

A veritable chorus of enthusiasm greeted the end of his long peroration. The Machiavellian scheme, almost devilish in its cunning, in its subtle knowledge of human nature and of the heart-strings of a noble organization like Déroulède's, commended itself to these patriots, who were thirsting for the downfall of a superior enemy.

Even Tinville lost his attitude of dry sarcasm; his thin cheeks were glowing with the lust of the fight.

Already for the past few months, the trials before the Committee of Public Safety had been dull, monotonous, uninteresting. Charlotte Corday had been a happy diversion, but otherwise it had been the case of various deputies, who had held views that had become too moderate, or of the generals who had failed to subdue the towns or provinces of the south.

But now this trial on the morrow—the excitement of it all, the trap laid for Déroulède, the pleasure of seeing him take the first step towards his own downfall. Every one there was eager and enthusiastic for the fray. Lenoir, having spoken at such length, had now become silent, but every one else talked, and drank brandy, and hugged his own hate and likely triumph.

For several hours, far into the night, the sitting was continued. Each one of the score of members had some comment to make on Lenoir's speech, some suggestion to offer.

Lenoir himself was the first to break up this weird gathering of human jackals, already exulting over their prey. He bade his companions a quiet good night, then passed out into the dark street.

After he had gone there were a few seconds of complete silence in the dark and sordid room, where men's ugliest passions were holding absolute sway. The giant's heavy footsteps echoed along the ill-paved street, and gradually died away in the distance.

Then at last Foucquier-Tinville, the Public Prosecutor, spoke:

"And who is that man?" he asked, addressing the assembly of patriots.

Most of them did not know.

"A provincial from the north," said one of the men at last; "he has been here several times before now, and last year he was a fairly constant attendant. I believe he is a butcher by trade, and I fancy he comes from Calais. He was originally brought here by Citizen Brogard, who is a good patriot enough."

One by one the members of this bond of Fraternity began to file out of the Cheval Borgne. They nodded curt good nights to each other, and then went to their respective abodes, which surely could not be dignified with the name of home.

Tinville remained one of the last; he and Merlin seemed suddenly to have buried the hatchet, which a few hours ago had threatened to destroy one or the other of these whilom bosom friends.

Two or three of the most ardent of these ardent extremists had gathered round the Public Prosecutor, and Merlin, the framer of the Law of the Suspect.

"What say you, citizens?" said Tinville at last quietly. "That man Lenoir, meseems, is too eloquent—eh?"

"Dangerous," pronounced Merlin, whilst the others nodded approval.

"But his scheme is good," suggested one of the men.

"And we'll avail ourselves of it," assented Tinville, "but afterwards——"

He paused, and once more every one nodded approval.

"Yes; he is dangerous. We'll leave him in peace to-morrow, but afterwards——"

With a gentle hand Tinville caressed the tall double post, which stood in the centre of the room, and which was shaped like the guillotine. An evil look was on his face: the grin of a death-dealing monster, savage and envious. The others laughed in grim content. Merlin grunted a surly approval. He had no cause to love the provincial coal-heaver who had raised a raucous voice to threaten him.

Then, nodding to one another, the last of the patriots, satisfied with this night's work, passed out into the night.

The watchman was making his rounds, carrying his lantern, and shouting his customary cry:

"Inhabitants of Paris, sleep quietly. Everything is in order, everything is at peace."

22

THE CLOSE OF DAY

DÉROULÈDE had spent the whole of this same night in a wild, impassioned search for Juliette.

Earlier in the day, soon after Anne Mie's revelations, he had sought out his English friend, Sir Percy Blakeney, and talked over with him the final arrangements for the removal of Madame Déroulède and Anne Mie from Paris.

Though he was a born idealist and a Utopian, Paul Déroulède had never for a moment had any illusions with regard to his own popularity. He knew that at any time, and for any trivial cause, the love which the mob bore him would readily turn to hate. He had seen Mirabeau's popularity wane, La Fayette's, Desmoulin's—was it likely that *he* alone would survive the inevitable death of so ephemeral a thing?

Therefore, whilst he was in power, whilst he was loved and trusted, he had, figuratively and actually, put his house in order. He had made full preparations for his own inevitable downfall, for that probable flight from Paris of those who were dependent upon him.

He had, as far back as a year ago, provided himself with the necessary passports, and bespoken with his English friend certain measures for the safety of his mother and his crippled little relative. Now it was merely a question of putting these measures into execution.

Within two hours of Juliette Marny's arrest, Madame Déroulède and Anne Mie had quitted the house in the Rue Ecole de Médecine. They had but little luggage with them, and were ostensibly going into the country to visit a sick cousin.

The mother of the popular Citizen-Deputy was free to travel unmolested. The necessary passports which the safety of the Republic demanded were all in perfect order, and Madame Déroulède and Anne Mie passed through the north gate of Paris an hour before sunset, on that 24th day of Fructidor.

Their large travelling chaise took them some distance on the North Road, where they were to meet Lord Hastings and Lord Antony Dewhurst, two of The Scarlet Pimpernel's most trusted lieutenants, who were to escort them as far as the coast, and thence see them safely aboard the English yacht.

On that score, therefore, Déroulède had no anxiety. His chief duty was to his mother and to Anne Mie, and that was now fully discharged.

Then there was old Pétronelle.

Ever since the arrest of her young mistress the poor old soul had been in a state of mind bordering on frenzy, and no amount of eloquence on Déroulède's part would persuade her to quit Paris without Juliette.

"If my pet lamb is to die," she said, amidst heart-broken sobs, "then I have no cause to live. Let those devils take me along too, if they want a useless old woman like me. But if my darling is allowed to go free, then what would become of her in this awful city without me? She and I have never been separated; she wouldn't know where to turn for a home. And who would cook for her and iron out her kerchiefs, I'd like to know?"

Reason and common sense were, of course, powerless in face of this sublime and heroic childishness. No one had the heart to tell the old woman that the murderous dog of the Revolution seldom loosened its fangs, once they had closed upon a victim.

All Déroulède could do was to convey Pétronelle to the old abode, which Juliette had quitted in order to come to him, and which had never been formally given up. The worthy soul, calmed and refreshed, deluded herself into the idea that she was waiting for the return of her young mistress, and became quite cheerful at sight of the familiar room.

Déroulède had provided her with money and necessaries. He had but few remaining hopes in his heart, but among them was the firmly-implanted one that Pétronelle was too insignificant to draw upon herself the terrible attention of the Committee of Public Safety.

By nightfall he had seen the good woman safely installed. Then only did he feel free.

At last he could devote himself to what seemed to him the one, the only, aim of his life—to find Juliette.

A dozen prisons in this vast Paris!

Over five thousand prisoners on that night awaiting trial, condemnation and death.

Déroulède at first, strong in his own power, his personality, had thought that the task would be comparatively easy.

At the Palais de Justice they would tell him nothing: the list of new arrests had not yet been handed in by the commandant of Paris, Citizen Santerre, who classified and docketed the miserable herd of aspirants for the next day's guillotine.

The lists, moreover, would not be completed until the next day, when the trials of the new prisoners would already be imminent.

The work of the Committee of Public Safety was done without much delay.

Then began Déroulède's weary quest through those twelve prisons of Paris.

From the Temple to the Conciergerie, from Palais Condé to the Luxembourg, he spent hours in the fruitless search.

Everywhere the same shrug of the shoulders, the same indifferent reply to his eager query:

"Juliette Marny? Inconnue."

Unknown! She had not yet been docketed, not yet classified; she was still one of that immense flock of cattle sent in ever-increasing numbers to the slaughter-house.

Presently, to-morrow, after a trial which might last ten minutes, after a hasty condemnation and quick return to prison, she would be listed as one of the traitors, whom this great and beneficent Republic sent daily to the guillotine.

Vainly did Déroulède try to persuade, to entreat, to bribe. The sullen guardians of these twelve charnel-houses knew nothing of individual prisoners.

But the Citizen-Deputy was allowed to look for himself. He was conducted to the great vaulted rooms of the Temple, to the vast ball-rooms of the Palais Condé, where herded the condemned and those still awaiting trial; he was allowed to witness there the grim farcical tragedies, with which the captives beguiled the few hours which separated them from death.

Mock trials were acted there; Tinville was mimicked; then the Place de la Révolution; Samson the headsman, with a couple of inverted chairs to represent the guillotine.

Daughters of dukes and princes, descendants of ancient lineage, acted in these weird and ghastly comedies. The ladies, with hair bound high over their heads, would kneel before the inverted chairs, and place their snow-white necks beneath this imaginary guillotine. Speeches were delivered to a mock populace, whilst a mock Santerre ordered a mock roll of drums to drown the last flow of eloquence of the supposed victim.

Oh! the horror of it all—the pity, pathos, and misery of this ghastly, parody in the very face of the sublimity of death!

Déroulède shuddered when first he beheld the scene, shuddered at the very thought of finding Juliette amongst these careless, laughing, thoughtless mimes.

His own, his beautiful Juliette, with her proud face and majestic, queen-like gestures; it was a relief not to see her there.

"Juliette Marny? Inconnue," was the final word he heard about her.

No one told him that by Deputy Merlin's strictest orders she had been labelled "dangerous," and placed in a remote wing of the Luxembourg Palace, together with a few, who, like herself, were allowed to see no one, communicate with no one.

Then when the *couvre-feu* had sounded, when all public places were closed, when the night watchman had begun his rounds, Déroulède knew that his quest for that night must remain fruitless.

But he could not rest. In and out the tortuous streets of Paris he roamed during the better part of that night. He was now only awaiting the dawn to publicly demand the right to stand beside Juliette.

A hopeless misery was in his heart, a longing for a cessation of life; only one thing kept his brain active, his mind clear: the hope of saving Juliette.

The dawn was breaking in the far east, when, wandering along the banks of the river, he suddenly felt a touch on his arm.

"Come to my hovel," said a pleasant, lazy voice close to his ear, whilst a kindly hand seemed to drag him away from the contemplation of the dark, silent river. "And a demmed beastly place it is too, but at least we can talk quietly there."

Déroulède, roused from his meditation, looked up to see his friend, Sir Percy Blakeney, standing close beside him. Tall, debonair, well-dressed, he seemed by his very presence to dissipate the morbid atmosphere which was beginning to weigh upon Déroulède's active mind.

Déroulède followed him readily enough through the intricate mazes of old Paris, and down the Rue des Arts, until Sir Percy stopped outside a small hostelry, the door of which stood wide open.

"Mine host has nothing to lose from footpads and thieves," explained the Englishman, as he guided his friend through the narrow doorway, then up a flight of rickety stairs, to a small room on the floor above. "He leaves all doors open for anyone to walk in, but, la! the interior of the house looks so uninviting that no one is tempted to enter."

"I wonder you care to stay here," remarked Déroulède, with a momentary smile, as he contrasted in his mind the fastidious appearance of his friend with the dinginess and dirt of these surroundings.

Sir Percy deposited his large person in the capacious depths of a creaky chair, stretched his long limbs out before him, and said quietly:

"I am only staying in this demmed hole until the moment when I can drag you out of this murderous city."

Déroulède shook his head.

"You'd best go back to England, then," he said, "for I'll never leave Paris now."

"Not without Juliette Marny, shall we say?" rejoined Sir Percy placidly.

"And I fear me that she has placed herself beyond our reach," said Déroulède sombrely.

"You know that she is in the Luxembourg Prison?" queried the Englishman suddenly.

"I guessed it, but could find no proof."

"And she will be tried to-morrow?"

"They never keep a prisoner pining too long," replied Déroulède bitterly. "I guessed that too."

"What do you mean to do?"

"Defend her with the last breath in my body."

"You love her still, then?" asked Blakeney, with a smile.

"Still?" The look, the accent, the agony of a hopeless passion conveyed in that one word, told Sir Percy Blakeney all that he wished to know."

"Yet she betrayed you," he said tentatively.

"And to atone for that sin—an oath, mind you, friend, sworn to her father—she is ready to give her life for me."

"And you are prepared to forgive?"

"To understand *is* to forgive," rejoined Déroulède simply, "and I love her."

"Your madonna!" said Blakeney, with a gently ironical smile.

"No; the woman I love, with all her weaknesses, all her sins; the woman to gain whom I would give my soul, to save whom I will give my life."

"And she?"

"She does not love me—would she have betrayed me else?"

He sat beside the table, and buried his head in his hands. Not even his dearest friend should see how much he had suffered, how deeply his love had been wounded.

Sir Percy said nothing, a curious, pleasant smile lurked round the corners of his mobile mouth. Through his mind there flitted the vision of beautiful Marguerite, who had so much loved yet so deeply wronged him, and, looking at his friend, he thought that Déroulède too would soon learn all the contradictions which wage a constant war in the innermost recesses of a feminine heart.

He made a movement as if he would say something more, something of grave import, then seemed to think better of it, and shrugged his broad shoulders, as if to say:

"Let time and chance take their course now."

When Déroulède looked up again Sir Percy was sitting placidly in the arm-chair, with an absolutely blank expression on his face.

"Now that you know how much I love her, my friend," said Déroulède as soon as he had mastered his emotions, "will you look after her when they have condemned me, and save her for my sake?"

A curious, enigmatic smile suddenly illumined Sir Percy's earnest countenance.

"Save her? Do you attribute supernatural powers to me, then, or to The League of the Scarlet Pimpernel?"

"To you, I think," rejoined Déroulède seriously.

Once more it seemed as if Sir Percy were about to reveal something of great importance to his friend, then once more he checked himself. The Scarlet Pimpernel was, above all, far-seeing and practical, a man of action and not of impulse. The glowing eyes of his friend, his nervous, febrile movements, did not suggest that he was in a fit state to be entrusted with plans, the success of which hung on a mere thread.

Therefore Sir Percy only smiled, and said quietly:

"Well, I'll do my best."

23

JUSTICE

THE day had been an unusually busy one.

Five and thirty prisoners, arraigned before the bar of the Committee of Public Safety, had been tried in the last eight hours—an average of rather more than four to the hour; twelve minutes and a half in which to send a human creature, full of life and health, to solve the great enigma which lies hidden beyond the waters of the Styx.

And Citizen-Deputy Foucquier-Tinville, the Public Prosecutor, had surpassed himself. He seemed indefatigable.

Each of these five and thirty prisoners had been arraigned for treason against the Republic, for conspiracy with her enemies, and all had to have irrefutable proofs of their guilt brought before the Committee of Public Safety. Sometimes a few letters, written to friends abroad, and seized at the frontier; a word of condemnation of the measures of the extremists; an expression of horror at the massacres on the Place de la Révolution, where the guillotine creaked incessantly—these were irrefutable proofs; or else perhaps a couple of pistols, or an old family sword seized in the house of a peaceful citizen, would be brought against a prisoner, as an irrefutable proof of his warlike dispositions against the Republic.

Oh! it was not difficult!

Out of five and thirty indictments, Foucquier-Tinville had obtained thirty convictions.

No wonder his friends declared that he had surpassed himself. It had indeed been a glorious day, and the glow of satisfaction as much as the heat, caused the Public Prosecutor to mop his high, bony cranium before he adjourned for the much-needed respite for refreshment.

The day's work was not yet done.

The "politicals" had been disposed of, and there had been such an accumulation of them recently that it was difficult to keep pace with the arrests.

And in the meanwhile the criminal record of the great city had not diminished. Because men butchered one another in the name of Equality, there were none the fewer among the Fraternity of thieves and petty pilferers, of ordinary cut-throats and public wantons.

And these too had to be dealt with by law. The guillotine was impartial, and fell with equal velocity on the neck of the proud duke and the gutter-born *fille de joie*, on a descendant of the Bourbons and the wastrel born in a brothel.

The ministerial decrees favoured the proletariat. A crime against the Republic was indefensive, but one against the individual was dealt with, with all the paraphernalia of an elaborate administration of justice. There were citizen judges and citizen advocates, and the rabble, who crowded in to listen to the trials, acted as honorary jury.

It was all thoroughly well done. The citizen criminals were given every chance.

The afternoon of this hot August day, one of the last of glorious Fructidor, had begun to wane, and the shades of evening to slowly creep into the long, bare room where this travesty of justice was being administered.

The Citizen-President sat at the extreme end of the room, on a rough wooden bench, with a desk in front of him littered with papers.

Just above him, on the bare, whitewashed wall, the words: "*La République: une et indivisible*," and below them the device: "*Liberté*, *Egalité*, *Fraternité*!"

To the right and left of the Citizen-President, four clerks were busy making entries in that ponderous ledger, that amazing record of the foulest crimes the world has ever known, the *Bulletin de Tribunal Révolutionnaire*."

At present no one is speaking, and the grating of the clerks' quill pens against the paper is the only sound which disturbs the silence of the hall.

In front of the President, on a bench lower than his, sits Citizen Foucquier-Tinville, rested and refreshed, ready to take up his occupation, for as many hours as his country demands it of him.

On every desk a tallow candle, smoking and spluttering, throws a weird light, and more weird shadows, on the faces of clerks and President, on blank walls and ominous devices.

In the centre of the room a platform surrounded by an iron railing is ready for the accused. Just in front of it, from the tall, raftered ceiling above, there hangs a small brass lamp, with a green *abat-jour.*

Each side of the long, whitewashed walls there are three rows of benches, beautiful old carved oak pews, snatched from Nôtre Dame and from the Churches of St. Eustache and St. Germain l'Auxerrois. Instead of the pious worshippers of mediæval times, they now accommodate the lookers-on of the grim spectacle of unfortunates, in their brief halt before the scaffold.

The front row of these benches is reserved for those citizen-deputies who desire to be present at the debates of the Tribunal Révolutionnaire. It is their privilege, almost their duty, as reprèsentatives of the people, to see that the sittings are properly conducted.

These benches are already well filled. At one end, on the left, Citizen Merlin, Minister of Justice, sits; next to him Citizen-Minister Lebrun; also Citizen Robespierre, still in the height of his ascendancy, and watching the proceedings with those pale, watery eyes of his and that curious, disdainful smile, which have earned for him the nickname of "the sea-green incorruptible."

Other well-known faces are there also, dimly outlined in the fast-gathering gloom. But every one notes Citizen-Deputy Déroulède, the idol of the people, as he sits on the extreme end of a bench on the right, with arms tightly folded across his chest, the light from the hanging lamp falling straight on his dark head and proud, straight brows, with the large, restless, eager eyes.

Anon the Citizen-President rings a hand-bell, and there is a discordant noise of hoarse laughter and loud curses, some pushing, jolting, and swearing, as the general public is admitted into the hall.

Heaven save us! What a rabble!

Has humanity really such a scum?

Women with single ragged kirtle and shift, through the interstices of which the naked, grime-covered flesh shows shamelessly: with bare legs, and feet thrust into heavy sabots, hair dishevelled, and evil, spirit-sodden faces: women without a semblance of womanhood, with shrivelled, barren breasts, and dry, parched lips, that have never known how to kiss. Women without emotion save that of hate, without desire, save for the satisfaction of hunger and thirst, and lust for revenge against their sisters less wretched, less unsexed than themselves. They crowd in, jostling one another, swarming into the front rows of the benches, where they can get a better view of the miserable victims about to be pilloried before them.

And the men without a semblance of manhood. Bent under the heavy care of their own degradation, dead to pity, to love, to chivalry; dead to all save an inordinate longing for the sight of blood.

And God help them all! for there were the children too. Children—save the mark!—with pallid, precocious little faces, pinched with the ravages of starvation, gazing with dim, filmy eyes on this world of rapacity and hideousness.

Children who have seen death!

Oh, the horror of it! Not beautiful, peaceful death, a slumber or a dream, a loved parent or fond sister or brother lying all in white amidst a wealth of flowers, but death in its most awesome aspect, violent, lurid, horrible.

And now they stare around them with eager, greedy eyes, awaiting the amusement of the spectacle; gazing at the President, with his tall Phrygian cap; at the clerks wielding their indefatigable quill pens, writing, writing, writing; at the flickering lights, throwing clouds of sooty smoke up to the dark ceiling above.

Then suddenly the eyes of one little mite—a poor, tiny midget not yet in her teens—alight on Paul Déroulède's face, on the opposite side of the room.

"Tiens! Papa Déroulède!" she says, pointing an attenuated little finger across at him, and turning eagerly to those around her, her eyes dilating in wistful recollection of a happy afternoon spent in Papa Déroulède's house, with fine white bread to eat in plenty, and great jars of foaming milk.

He rouses himself from his apathy, and his great earnest eyes lose their look of agonized misery as he responds to the greeting of the little one.

For one moment—oh! a mere fraction of a second—the squalid faces, the miserable, starved expressions of the crowd, soften at sight of him. There is a faint murmur among the women, which perhaps God's recording angel registered as a blessing. Who knows?

Foucquier-Tinville suppresses a sneer, and the Citizen-President impatiently rings his hand-bell again.

"Bring forth the accused!" he commands in stentorian tones.

There is a movement of satisfaction among the crowd, and the angel of God is forced to hide his face again.

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THE TRIAL OF JULIETTE

It is all indelibly placed on record in the *Bulletin de Tribunal Révolutionnaire*, under date 25th Fructidor, year II. of the Revolution.

Anyone who cares may read, for the Bulletin is in the Archives of the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris.

One by one the accused had been brought forth, escorted by two men of the National Guard in ragged, stained uniforms of red, white, and blue; they were then conducted to the small raised platform in the centre of the hall, and made to listen to the charge brought against them by Citizen Foucquier-Tinville, the Public Prosecutor.

They were petty charges mostly: pilfering, fraud, theft, occasionally arson or manslaughter. One man, however, was arraigned for murder with highway robbery, and a woman for the most ignoble traffic which evil feminine ingenuity could invent.

These two were condemned to the guillotine, the others sent to the galleys at Brest or Toulon—the forger along with the petty thief, the housebreaker with the absconding clerk.

There was no room in the prisons for ordinary offences against the criminal code; they were overfilled already with so-called traitors against the Republic.

Three women were sent to the penitentiary at the Salpêtriere, and were dragged out of the court shrilly protesting their innocence, and followed by obscene jeers from the spectators on the benches.

Then there was a momentary hush.

Juliette Marny had been brought in.

She was quite calm, and exquisitely beautiful, dressed in a plain grey bodice and kirtle, with a black band round her slim waist and a soft white kerchief folded across her bosom. Beneath the tiny, white cap her golden hair appeared in dainty, curly profusion; her child-like, oval face was very white, but otherwise quite serene.

She seemed absolutely unconscious of her surroundings, and walked with a firm step up to the platform, looking neither to the right nor to the left of her.

Therefore she did not see Déroulède. A great, a wonderful radiance seemed to shine in her large eyes—the radiance of self-sacrifice.

She was offering not only her life, but everything a woman of refinement holds most dear, for the safety of the man she loved.

A feeling that was almost physical pain, so intense was it, overcame Déroulède, when at last he heard her name loudly called by the Public Prosecutor.

All day he had waited for this awful moment, forgetting his own misery, his own agonized feeling of an irretrievable loss, in the horrible thought of what *she* would endure, what *she* would think, when first she realized the terrible indignity which was to be put upon her.

Yet for the sake of her, of her chances of safety and of ultimate freedom, it was undoubtedly best that it should be so.

Arraigned for conspiracy against the Republic, she was liable to secret trial, to be brought up, condemned, and executed before he could even hear of her whereabouts, before he could throw himself before her judges and take all guilt upon himself.

Those suspected of treason against the Republic forfeited, according to Merlin's most iniquitous Law, their rights of citizenship, in publicity of trial and in defence.

It all might have been finished before Déroulède knew anything of it.

The other way was, of course, more terrible. Brought forth amongst the scum of criminal Paris, on a charge, the horror of which he could but dimly hope that she was too innocent to fully understand, he dared not even think of what she would suffer.

But undoubtedly it was better so.

The mud thrown at her robes of purity could never cling to her, and at least her trial would be public; he would be there to take all infamy, all disgrace, all opprobrium on himself.

The strength of his appeal would turn her judges' wrath from her to him; and after these few moments of misery, she would be free to leave Paris, France, to be happy, and to forget him and the memory of him.

An overwhelming, all-compelling love filled his entire soul for the beautiful girl who had so wronged, yet so nobly tried to save him. A longing for her made his very sinews ache; she was no longer madonna, and her beauty thrilled him, with the passionate, almost sensuous desire to give his life for her.

The indictment against Juliette Marny has become history now.

On that day, the 25th Fructidor, at seven o'clock in the evening, it was read out by the Public Prosecutor, and listened to by the accused—so the Bulletin tells us—with complete calm and apparent indifference. She stood up in that same pillory where once stood poor, guilty Charlotte Corday, where presently would stand proud, guiltless Marie Antoinette.

And Déroulède listened to the scurrilous document, with all the outward calm his strength of will could command. He would have liked to rise from his seat then and there, at once, and in mad, purely animal fury have, with a blow of his fist, quashed the words in Foucquier-Tinville's lying throat.

But for her sake he was bound to listen, and, above all, to act quietly, deliberately, according to form and procedure so as in no way to imperil her cause.

Therefore he listened whilst the Public Prosecutor spoke.

"Juliette Marny, you are hereby accused of having, by a false and malicious denunciation, slandered the person of a representative of the people; you caused the Revolutionary Tribunal, through this same mischievous act, to bring a charge against this representative of the people, to institute a domiciliary search in his house, and to waste valuable time, which otherwise belonged to the service of the Republic. And this you did, not from a misguided sense of duty towards your country, but in wanton and impure spirit, to be rid of the surveillance of one who had your welfare at heart, and who tried to prevent your leading the immoral life which had become a public scandal, and which has now brought you before this court of justice, to answer to a charge of wantonness, impurity, defamation of character, and corruption of public morals. In proof of which I now place before the court your own admission that more than one citizen of the Republic has been led by you into immoral relationship with yourself; and further, your own admission that your accusation against Citizen-Deputy Déroulède was false and mischievous; and further, and finally, your immoral and obscene correspondence with some persons unknown, which you vainly tried to destroy. In consideration of which, and in the name of the people of France, whose spokesman I am, I demand that you be taken hence from this Hall of Justice to the Place de la Révolution, in full view of the citizens of Paris and its environs, and clad in a soiled white garment, emblem of the smirch upon your soul, that there you be publicly whipped by the hands of Citizen Samson, the public executioner; after which, that you be taken to the prison of the Salpêtriere, there to be further detained at the discretion of the Committee of Public Safety. And now, Juliette Marny, you have heard the indictment preferred against you, have you anything to say, why the sentence which I have demanded shall not be passed upon you?"

Jeers, shouts, laughter, and curses greeted this speech of the Public Prosecutor.

All that was most vile and most bestial in this miserable, misguided people struggling for Utopia and Liberty, seemed to come to the surface, whilst listening to the reading of this most infamous document.

The delight of seeing this beautiful, ethereal woman, almost unearthly in her proud aloofness, smirched with the vilest mud to which the vituperation of man can contrive to sink, was a veritable treat to the degraded wretches.

The women yelled hoarse approval; the children, not understanding, laughed in mirthless glee; the men, with loud curses, showed their appreciation of Foucquier-Tinville's speech.

As for Déroulède, the mental agony he endured surpassed any torture which the devils, they say, reserve for the damned. His sinews cracked in his frantic efforts to control himself; he dug his finger-nails into his flesh, trying by physical pain to drown the sufferings of his mind.

He thought that his reason was tottering, that he would go mad if he heard another word of this infamy. The hooting and yelling of that filthy mob sounded like the cries of lost souls, shrieking from hell. All his pity for them was gone, his love for humanity, his devotion to the suffering poor.

A great, an immense hatred for this ghastly Revolution and the people it professed to free filled his whole being, together with a mad, hideous desire to see them suffer, starve, die a miserable, loathsome death. The passion of hate, that now overwhelmed his soul, was at least as ugly as theirs. He was, for one brief moment, now at one with them in their inordinate lust for revenge.

Only Juliette throughout all this remained calm, silent, impassive.

She had heard the indictment, heard the loathsome sentence, for her white cheeks had gradually become ashy pale, but never for a moment did she depart from her attitude of proud aloofness.

She never once turned her head towards the mob who insulted her. She waited in complete passiveness until the yelling and shouting had subsided, motionless save for her finger-tips, which beat an impatient tattoo upon the railing in front of her.

The Bulletin says that she took out her handkerchief and wiped her face with it. *Elle s'essuya le* *front qui fut perlé de sueur.* The heat had become oppressive.

The atmosphere was overcharged with the dank, penetrating odour of steaming, dirty clothes. The room, though vast, was close and suffocating, the tallow candles flickering in the humid, hot air threw the faces of the President and clerks into bold relief, with curious caricature effects of light and shade.

The petrol lamp above the head of the accused had flared up, and begun to smoke, causing the chimney to crack with a sharp report. This diversion effected a momentary silence among the crowd, and the Public Prosecutor was able to repeat his query:

"Juliette Marny, have you anything to say in reply to the charge brought against you, and why the sentence which I have demanded should not be passed against you?"

The sooty smoke from the lamp came down in small, black, greasy particles; Juliette, with her slender finger-tips, flicked one of these quietly off her sleeve, then she replied:

"No; I have nothing to say."

"Have you instructed an advocate to defend you, according to your rights of citizenship, which the Law allows?" added the Public Prosecutor solemnly.

Juliette would have replied at once; her mouth had already framed the No with which she meant to answer.

But now at last had come Déroulède's hour. For this he had been silent, had suffered and had held his peace, whilst twice twenty-four hours had dragged their weary lengths along, since the arrest of the woman he loved.

In a moment he was on his feet before them all, accustomed to speak, to dominate, to command.

"Citizeness Juliette Marny has entrusted me with her defence," he said, even before the No had escaped Juliette's white lips, "and I am here to refute the charges brought against her, and to demand in the name of the people of France full acquittal and justice for her."

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THE DEFENCE

INTENSE excitement, which found vent in loud applause, greeted Déroulède's statement.

"Ça ira! ça ira! vas-y Déroulède!" came from the crowded benches round; and men, women, and children, wearied with the monotony of the past proceedings, settled themselves down for a quarter of an hour's keen enjoyment.

If Déroulède had anything to do with it, the trial was sure to end in excitement. And the people were always ready to listen to their special favourite.

The citizen-deputies, drowsy after the long, oppressive day, seemed to rouse themselves to renewed interest. Lebrun, like a big, shaggy dog, shook himself free from creeping somnolence. Robespierre smiled between his thin lips, and looked across at Merlin to see how the situation affected him. The enmity between the Minister of Justice and Citizen Déroulède was well known, and every one noted, with added zest, that the former wore a keen look of anticipated triumph.

High up, on one of the topmost benches, sat Citizen Lenoir, the stage-manager of this palpitating drama. He looked down, with obvious satisfaction, at the scene which he himself had suggested last night to the members of the Jacobin Club. Merlin's sharp eyes had tried to pierce the gloom, which wrapped the crowd of spectators, searching vainly to distinguish the broad figure and massive head of the provincial giant.

The light from the petrol lamp shone full on Déroulède's earnest, dark countenance as he looked Juliette's infamous accuser full in the face, but the tallow candles, flickering weirdly on the President's desk, threw Tinville's short, spare figure and large, unkempt head into curious grotesque silhouette.

Juliette apparently had lost none of her calm, and there was no one there sufficiently interested in her personality to note the tinge of delicate colour which, at the first word of Déroulède, had slowly mounted to her pale cheeks.

Tinville waited until the wave of excitement had broken upon the shoals of expectancy.

Then he resumed:

"Then, Citizen Déroulède, what have *you* to say, why sentence should not be passed upon the accused?"

"I have to say that the accused is innocent of every charge brought against her in your indictment," replied Déroulède firmly.

"And how do you substantiate this statement, Citizen-Deputy?" queried Tinville, speaking with mock unctuousness.

"Very simply, Citizen Tinville. The correspondence to which you refer did not belong to the accused, but to me. It consisted of certain communications, which I desired to hold with Marie Antoinette, now a prisoner in the Conciergerie, during my stay there as lieutenant-governor. The Citizeness Juliette Marny, by denouncing me, was serving the Republic, for my communications with Marie Antoinette had reference to my own hopes of seeing her quit this country and take refuge in her own native land."

Gradually, as Déroulède spoke, a murmur, like the distant roar of a monstrous breaker, rose among the crowd on the upper benches. As he continued quietly and firmly, so it grew in volume and in intensity, until his last words were drowned in one mighty, thunderous shout of horror and execration.

Déroulède, the friend and idol of the people, the privileged darling of this unruly population, the father of the children, the friend of the women, the sympathizer in all troubles, Papa Déroulède as the little ones called him—he a traitor, self-accused, plotting and planning for an ex-tyrant, a harlot who had called herself a queen, for Marie Antoinette the Austrian, who had desired and worked for the overthrow of France! He, Déroulède, a traitor!

In one moment, as he spoke, the love which in their crude hearts they bore him, that animal, primitive love, was turned to sudden, equally irresponsible hate. He had deceived them, laughed at them, tried to bribe them by feeding their little ones!

Bah! the bread of the traitor! It might have choked the children.

Surprise at first had taken their breath away. Already they had marvelled why he should stand up to defend a wanton. And now, probably feeling that he was on the point of being found out, he thought it better to make a clean breast of his own treason, trusting in his popularity, in his power over the people.

Bah!!!

Not one extenuating circumstance did they find in their hardened hearts for him.

He had been their idol, enshrined in their squalid, degraded minds, and now he had fallen, shattered beyond recall, and they hated and loathed him as much as they had loved him before.

And this his enemies noted, and smiled with complete satisfaction.

Merlin heaved a sigh of relief. Tinville nodded his shaggy head, in token of intense delight.

What that provincial coal-heaver had foretold had indeed come to pass.

The populace, that most fickle of all fickle things in this world, had turned all at once against its favourite. This Lenoir had predicted, and the transition had been even more rapid than he had anticipated.

Déroulède had been given a length of rope, and, figuratively speaking, had already hanged himself.

The reality was a mere matter of a few hours now. At dawn to-morrow the guillotine; and the mob of Paris, who yesterday would have torn his detractors limb from limb, would on the morrow be dragging him, with hoots and yells and howls of execration, to the scaffold.

The most shadowy of all footholds, that of the whim of a populace, had already given way under him. His enemies knew it, and were exulting in their triumph. He knew it himself, and stood up, calmly defiant, ready for any event, if only he succeeded in snatching her beautiful head from the ready embrace of the guillotine.

Juliette herself had remained as if entranced. The colour had again fled from her cheeks, leaving them paler, more ashen than before. It seemed as if in this moment she suffered more than human creature could bear, more than any torture she had undergone hitherto.

He would not owe his life to her.

That was the one overwhelming thought in her, which annihilated all others. His love for her was dead, and he would not accept the great sacrifice at her hands.

Thus these two in the supreme moment of their life saw each other, yet did not understand. A word, a touch would have given them both the key to one another's heart, and it now seemed as if death would part them for ever, whilst that great enigma remained unsolved.

The Public Prosecutor had been waiting until the noise had somewhat subsided, and his voice could be heard above the din, then he said, with a smile of ill-concealed satisfaction:

"And is the court, then, to understand, Citizen-Deputy Déroulède, that it was you who tried to burn the treasonable correspondence and to destroy the case which contained it?"

"The treasonable correspondence was mine, and it was I who destroyed it."

"But the accused admitted before Citizen Merlin that she herself was trying to burn certain love-letters, that would have brought to light her illicit relationships with another man than yourself," argued Tinville suavely. The rope was perhaps not quite long enough; Déroulède must have all that could be given him, ere this memorable sitting was adjourned.

Déroulède, however, instead of directing his reply straight to his enemy, now turned towards the dense crowd of spectators, on the benches opposite to him.

"Citizens, friends, brothers," he said warmly, "the accused is only a girl, young, innocent, knowing nothing of peril or of sin. You all have mothers, sisters, daughters—have you not watched those dear to you in the many moods of which a feminine heart is capable; have you not seen them affectionate, tender, and impulsive? Would you love them so dearly but for the fickleness of their moods? Have you not worshipped them in your hearts for those sublime impulses which put all man's plans and calculations to shame? Look on the accused, citizens. She loves the Republic, the people of France, and feared that I, an unworthy representative of her sons, was hatching treason against our great mother. That was her first wayward impulse—to stop me before I committed the awful crime, to punish me, or perhaps only to warn me. Does a young girl calculate, citizens? She acts as her heart dictates; her reason but awakes from slumber later on, when the act is done. Then comes repentance sometimes: another impulse of tenderness which we all revere. Would you extract vinegar from rose leaves? Just as readily could you find reason in a young girl's head. Is that a crime? She wished to thwart me in my treason; then, seeing me in peril, the sincere friendship she had for me gained the upper hand once more. She loved my mother, who might be losing a son; she loved my crippled foster-sister; for *their* sakes, not for mine—a traitor's—did she yield to another, a heavenly impulse, that of saving me from the consequences of my own folly. Was *that* a crime, citizens? When you are ailing, do not your mothers, sisters, wives tend you? when you are seriously ill, would they not give their heart's blood to save you? and when, in the dark hours of your lives, some deed which you would not openly avow before the world overweights your soul with its burden of remorse, is it not again your womenkind who come to you, with tender words and soothing voices, trying to ease your aching conscience, bringing solace, comfort, and peace? And so it was with the accused, citizens. She had seen my crime, and longed to punish it; she saw those who had befriended her in sorrow and she tried to ease their pain by taking *my* guilt upon her shoulders. She has suffered for the noble lie, which she has told on my behalf, as no woman has ever been made to suffer before. She has stood, white and innocent as your new-born children, in the pillory of infamy. She was ready to endure death, and what was ten thousand times worse than death, because of her own warm-hearted affection. But you, citizens of France, who, above all, are noble, true, and chivalrous, you will not allow the sweet impulses of young and tender womanhood to be punished with the ban of felony. To you, women of France, I appeal in the name of your childhood, your girlhood, your motherhood; take her to your hearts, she is worthy of it, worthier now for having blushed before you, worthier than any heroine in the great roll of honour of France."

His magnetic voice went echoing along the rafters of the great sordid Hall of Justice, filling it with a glory it had never known before. His enthusiasm thrilled his hearers, his appeal to their honour and chivalry roused all the finer feelings within them. Still hating him for his treason, his magical appeal had turned their hearts towards her.

They had listened to him without interruption, and now at last, when he paused, it was very evident, by muttered exclamations and glances cast at Juliette, that popular feeling, which up to the present had practically ignored her, now went out towards her personality with overwhelming sympathy.

Obviously at the present moment, if Juliette's fate had been put to the plebiscite, she would have been unanimously acquitted.

Merlin, as Déroulède spoke, had once or twice tried to read his friend Foucquier-Tinville's enigmatical expression, but the Public Prosecutor, with his face in deep shadow, had not moved a muscle during the Citizen-Deputy's noble peroration. He sat at his desk, chin resting on hand, staring before him with an expression of indifference, almost of boredom.

Now, when Déroulède finished speaking, and the outburst of human enthusiasm had somewhat subsided, he rose slowly to his feet, and said quietly:

"So you maintain, Citizen-Deputy, that the accused is a chaste and innocent girl, unjustly charged with immorality?"

"I do," protested Déroulède loudly.

"And will you tell the court why you are so ready to publicly accuse yourself of treason against the Republic, knowing full well all the consequences of your action?"

"Would any Frenchman care to save his own life at the expense of a woman's honour?" retorted Déroulède proudly.

A murmur of approval greeted these words, and Tinville remarked unctuously:

"Quite so, quite so. We esteem your chivalry, Citizen-Deputy. The same spirit, no doubt, actuates you to maintain that the accused knew nothing of the papers which you say you destroyed?"

"She knew nothing of them. I destroyed them; I did not know that they had been found; on my return to my house I discovered that the Citizeness Juliette Marny had falsely accused herself of having destroyed some papers surreptitiously."

"She said they were love-letters."

"It is false."

"You declare her to be pure and chaste?"

"Before the whole world."

"Yet you were in the habit of frequenting the bedroom of this pure and chaste girl, who dwelt under your roof," said Tinville with slow and deliberate sarcasm.

"It is false."

"If it be false, Citizen Déroulède," continued the other with the same unctuous suavity, "then how comes it that the correspondence which you admit was treasonable, and therefore presumably secret—how comes it that it was found, still smouldering, in the chaste young woman's bedroom, and the torn letter-case concealed among her dresses in a valise?"

"It is false."

"The Minister of Justice, Citizen-Deputy Merlin, will answer for the truth of that."

"It is the truth," said Juliette quietly.

Her voice rang out clear, almost triumphant, in the midst of the breathless pause, caused by the previous swift questions and loud answers.

Déroulède now was silent.

This one simple fact he did not know. Anne Mie, in telling him the events in connection with the arrest of Juliette, had omitted to give him the one little detail, that the burnt letters were found in the young girl's bedroom.

Up to the moment when the Public Prosecutor confronted him with it, he had been under the impression that she had destroyed the papers and the letter-case in the study, where she had remained alone after Merlin and his men had left the room. She could easily have burnt them there, as a tiny spirit lamp was always kept alight on a side table for the use of smokers.

This little fact now altered the entire course of events. Tinville had but to frame an indignant ejaculation:

"Citizens of France, see how you are being befooled and hoodwinked!"

Then he turned once more to Déroulède.

"Citizen Déroulède——" he began.

But in the tumult that ensued he could no longer hear his own voice. The pent-up rage of the entire mob of Paris seemed to find vent for itself in the howls with which the crowd now tried to drown the rest of the proceedings.

As their brutish hearts had been suddenly melted on behalf of Juliette, in response to Déroulède's passionate appeal, so now they swiftly changed their sympathetic attitude to one of horror and execration. Two people had fooled and deceived them. One of these they had reverenced and trusted, as much as their degraded minds were capable of reverencing anything, therefore *his* sin seemed doubly damnable. He and that pale-faced aristocrat had for weeks now, months, or years perhaps, conspired against the Republic, against the Revolution, which had been made by a people thirsting for liberty. During these months and years *he* had talked to them, and they had listened; he had poured forth treasures of eloquence, cajoled them, as he had done just now.

The noise and hubbub were growing apace. If Tinville and Merlin had desired to infuriate the mob, they had more than succeeded. All that was most bestial, most savage in this awful Parisian populace rose to the surface now in one wild, mad desire for revenge.

The crowd rushed down from the benches, over one another's heads, over children's fallen bodies; they rushed down because they wanted to get at him, their whilom favourite, and at his pale-faced mistress, and tear them to pieces, hit them, scratch out their eyes. They snarled like so many wild beasts, the women shrieked, the children cried, and the men of the National Guard, hurrying forward, had much ado to keep back this flood-tide of hate.

Had any of them broken loose, from behind the barrier of bayonets hastily raised against them, it would have fared ill with Déroulède and Juliette.

The President wildly rang his bell, and his voice, quivering with excitement, was heard once or twice above the din.

"Clear the court! Clear the court!"

But the people refused to be cleared out of court.

"À la lanterne les traîtres! Mort à Déroulède. À la lanterne! l'aristo!"

And in the thickest of the crowd, the broad shoulders and massive head of Citizen Lenoir towered above the others.

At first it seemed as if he had been urging on the mob in its fury. His strident voice, with its broad provincial accent, was heard distinctly shouting loud vituperations against the accused.

Then at a given moment, when the tumult was at its height, when the National Guard felt their bayonets giving way before this onrushing tide of human jackals, Lenoir changed his tactics.

"Tiens! c'est bête!" he shouted loudly, "we shall do far better with the traitors when we get them outside. What say you, citizens? Shall we leave the judges here to conclude the farce, and arrange for its sequel ourselves outside the 'Tigre Jaune'?"

At first but little heed was paid to his suggestion, and he repeated it once or twice, adding some interesting details:

"One is freer in the streets, where these apes of the National Guard can't get between the people of France and their just revenge. Ma foi!" he added, squaring his broad shoulders, and pushing his way through the crowd towards the door, "I for one am going to see where hangs the most suitable lanterne."

Like a flock of sheep the crowd now followed him.

"The nearest lanterne!" they shouted. "In the streets—in the streets! À la lanterne! The traitors!"

And with many a jeer, many a loathsome curse, and still more loathsome jests, some of the crowd began to file out. A few only remained to see the conclusion of the farce.

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SENTENCE OF DEATH

The *Bulletin du Tribunal Révolutionnaire* tells us that both the accused had remained perfectly calm during the turmoil which raged within the bare walls of the Hall of Justice.

Citizen-Deputy Déroulède, however, so the chroniclers aver, though outwardly impassive, was evidently deeply moved. He had very expressive eyes, clear mirrors of the fine, upright soul within, and in them there was a look of intense emotion as he watched the crowd, which he had so often dominated and controlled, now turning in hatred against him. He seemed actually to be seeing with a spiritual vision, his own popularity wane and die.

But when the thick of the crowd had pushed and jostled itself out of the hall, that transient emotion seemed to disappear, and he allowed himself quietly to be led from the front bench, where he had sat as a privileged member of the National Convention, to a place immediately behind the dock, and between two men of the National Guard.

From that moment he was a prisoner, accused of treason against the Republic, and obviously his mock trial would be hurried through by his triumphant enemies, whilst the temper of the people was at boiling point against him.

Complete silence had succeeded the raging tumult of the last few moments. Nothing now could be heard in the vast room save Foucquier-Tinville's hastily whispered instructions to the clerk nearest to him, and the scratch of the latter's quill pen against the paper.

The President was, with equal rapidity, affixing his signature to various papers handed up to him by the other clerks. The few remaining spectators, the deputies, and those among the crowd who had elected to see the close of the debate, were silent and expectant.

Merlin was mopping his forehead as if in intense fatigue after a hard struggle; Robespierre was coolly taking snuff.

From where Déroulède stood, he could see Juliette's graceful figure silhouetted against the light of the petrol lamp. His heart was torn between intense misery at having failed to save her and a curious, exultant joy at thought of dying beside her.

He knew the procedure of this revolutionary tribunal well—knew that within the next few moments he too would be condemned, that they would both be hustled out of the crowd and dragged through the streets of Paris, and finally thrown into the same prison, to herd with those who, like themselves, had but a few hours to live.

And then to-morrow at dawn, death for them both under the guillotine. Death in public, with all its attendant horrors: the packed tumbril; the priest, in civil clothes, appointed by this godless government, muttering conventional prayers and valueless exhortations.

And in his heart there was nothing but love for her—love and an intense pity—for the punishment she was suffering was far greater than her crime. He hoped that in her heart remorse would not be too bitter; and he looked forward with joy to the next few hours, which he would pass near her, during which he could perhaps still console and soothe her.

She was but the victim of an ideal, of Fate stronger than her own will. She stood, an innocent martyr to the great mistake of her life.

But the minutes sped on. Foucquier-Tinville had evidently completed his new indictments.

The one against Juliette Marny was read out first. She was now accused of conspiring with Paul Déroulède against the safety of the Republic, by having cognizance of a treasonable correspondence carried on with the prisoner, Marie Antoinette; by virtue of which accusation the Public Prosecutor asked her if she had anything to say.

"No," she replied loudly and firmly. "I pray to God for the safety and deliverance of our Queen, Marie Antoinette, and for the overthrow of this Reign of Terror and Anarchy."

These words, registered in the *Bulletin du Tribunal Révolutionnaire*, were taken as final and irrefutable proofs of her guilt, and she was then summarily condemned to death.

She was then made to step down from the dock and Déroulède to stand in her place.

He listened quietly to the long indictment which Foucquier-Tinville had already framed against him the evening before, in readiness for this contingency. The words "treason against the Republic" occurred conspicuously and repeatedly. The document itself is at one with the thousands of written charges, framed by that odious Foucquier-Tinville during these periods of bloodshed, and which in themselves are the most scathing indictments against the odious travesty of Justice, perpetrated with his help.

Self-accused, and avowedly a traitor, Déroulède was not even asked if he had anything to say; sentence of death was passed on him, with the rapidity and callousness peculiar to these proceedings.

After which Paul Déroulède and Juliette Marny were led forth, under strong escort, into the street.

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THE FRUCTIDOR RIOTS

Many accounts, more or less authentic, have been published of the events known to history as the "Fructidor Riots."

But this is how it all happened: at any rate it is the version related some few days later in England to the Prince of Wales by no less a personage than Sir Percy Blakeney; and who indeed should know better than the Scarlet Pimpernel himself?

Déroulède and Juliette Marny were the last of the batch of prisoners who were tried on that memorable day of Fructidor.

There had been such a number of these that all the covered carts in use for the conveyance of prisoners to and from the Hall of Justice had already been despatched with their weighty human load; thus it was that only a rough wooden cart, hoodless and rickety, was available, and into this Déroulède and Juliette were ordered to mount.

It was now close on nine o'clock in the evening. The streets of Paris, sparsely illuminated here and there with solitary oil lamps swung across from house to house on wires, presented a miserable and squalid appearance. A thin, misty rain had begun to fall, transforming the ill-paved roads into morasses of sticky mud.

The Hall of Justice was surrounded by a howling and shrieking mob, who, having imbibed all the stores of brandy in the neighbouring drinking-bars, was now waiting outside in the dripping rain for the express purpose of venting its pent-up, spirit-sodden lust of rage against the man whom it had once worshipped, but whom now it hated. Men, women, and even children swarmed round the principal entrances of the Palais de Justice, along the bank of the river as far as the Pont au Change, and up towards the Luxembourg Palace, now transformed into the prison, to which the condemned would no doubt be conveyed.

Along the river bank, and immediately facing the Palais de Justice, a row of gallows-shaped posts, at intervals of a hundred yards or more, held each a smoky petrol lamp, at a height of some eight feet from the ground.

One of these lamps had been knocked down, and from the post itself there now hung ominously a length of rope, with a noose at the end.

Around this improvised gallows a group of women sat, or rather squatted, in the mud; their ragged shifts and kirtles, soaked through with the drizzling rain, hung dankly on their emaciated forms; their hair, in some cases grey, and in others dark or straw-coloured, clung matted round their wet faces, on which the dirt and the damp had drawn weird and grotesque lines.

The men were restless and noisy, rushing aimlessly hither and thither, from the corner of the bridge, up the Rue du Palais, fearful lest their prey be conjured away ere their vengeance was satisfied.

Oh, how they hated their former idol now! Citizen Lenoir, with his broad shoulders and powerful, grime-covered head, towered above the throng; his strident voice, with its raucous, provincial accent, could be distinctly heard above the din, egging on the men, shouting to the women, stirring up hatred against the prisoners, wherever it showed signs of abating in intensity.

The coal-heaver, hailing from some distant province, seemed to have set himself the grim task of provoking the infuriated populace to some terrible deed of revenge against Déroulède and Juliette.

The darkness of the street, the fast-falling mist which obscured the light from the meagre oil lamps, seemed to add a certain weirdness to this moving, seething multitude. No one could see his neighbour. In the blackness of the night the muttering or yelling figures moved about like some spectral creatures from hellish regions—the Akous of Brittany who call to those about to die; whilst the women squatting in the oozing mud, beneath that swinging piece of rope, looked like a group of ghostly witches, waiting for the hour of their Sabbath.

As Déroulède emerged into the open, the light from a swinging lantern in the doorway fell full upon his face. The foremost of the crowd recognized him;

a howl of execration went up to the cloud-covered sky, and a hundred hands were thrust out in deadly menace against him.

It seemed as if they wished to tear him to pieces.

"À la lanterne! À la lanterne! le traître!"

He shivered slightly, as if with the sudden blast of cold, humid air, but he stepped quietly into the cart, closely followed by Juliette.

The strong escort of the National Guard, with Commandant Santerre and his two drummers, had much ado to keep back the mob. It was not the policy of the revolutionary government to allow excesses of summary justice in the streets: the public execution of traitors on the Place de la Révolution, the processions in the tumbrils, were thought to be wholesome examples for other would-be traitors to mark and digest.

Citizen Santerre, military commandant of Paris, had ordered his men to use their bayonets ruthlessly, and, to further overawe the populace, he ordered a prolonged roll of drums, lest Déroulède took it into his head to speak to the crowd.

But Déroulède had no such intention: he seemed chiefly concerned in shielding Juliette from the cold; she had been made to sit in the cart beside him, and he had taken off his coat, and was wrapping it round her against the penetrating rain.

The eye-witnesses of these memorable events have declared that, at a given moment, he looked up suddenly with a curious, eager expression in his eyes, and then raised himself in the cart and seemed to be trying to penetrate the gloom round him, as if in search of a face, or perhaps a voice.

"À la lanterne! À la lanterne!" was the continual hoarse cry of the mob.

Up to now, flanked in their rear by the outer walls of the Palais de Justice, the soldiers had found it a fairly easy task to keep the crowd at bay. But there came a time when the cart was bound to move out into the open, in order to convey the prisoners along, by the Rue du Palais, up to the Luxembourg Prison.

This task, however, had become more and more difficult every moment. The people of Paris, who for two years had been told by its tyrants that it was supreme lord of the universe, was mad with rage at seeing its desires frustrated by a few soldiers.

The drums had been greeted by terrific yells, which effectually drowned their roll; the first movement of the cart was hailed by a veritable tumult.

Only the women who squatted round the gallows had not moved from their position of vantage; one of these Magæras was quietly readjusting the rope, which had got out of place.

But all the men and some of the women were literally besieging the cart, and threatening the soldiers, who stood between them and the object of their fury.

It seemed as if nothing now could save Déroulède, and Juliette from an immediate and horrible death.

"A mort! A mort! À la lanterne les traîtres!"

Santerre himself, who had shouted himself hoarse, was at a loss what to do. He had sent one man to the nearest cavalry barracks, but reinforcements would still be some little time coming; whilst in the meanwhile his men were getting exhausted, and the mob, more and more excited, threatened to break through their line at every moment.

There was not another second to be lost.

Santerre was for letting the mob have its way, and he would willingly have thrown it the prey for which it clamoured; but orders were orders, and in the year I of the Revolution it was not good to disobey.

At this supreme moment of perplexity he suddenly felt a respectful touch on his arm.

Close behind him a soldier of the National Guard —not one of his own men—was standing at attention, and holding a small, folded paper in his hand.

"Sent to you by the Minister of Justice," whispered the soldier hurriedly. "The citizen-deputies have watched the tumult from the Hall; they say you must not lose an instant."

Santerre withdrew from the front rank, up against the side of the cart, where a rough stable lantern had been fixed. He took the paper from the soldier's hand, and, hastily tearing it open, he read it by the dim light of the lantern.

As he read, his thick, coarse features expressed the keenest satisfaction.

"You have two more men with you?" he asked quickly.

"Yes, citizen," replied the man, pointing towards his right; "and the Citizen-Minister said you would give me two more."

"You'll take the prisoners quietly across to the Prison of the Temple—you understand that?"

"Yes, citizen; Citizen Merlin has given me full instructions. You can have the cart drawn back a little more under the shadow of the portico, where the prisoners can be made to alight; they can then be given into my charge. You in the meantime are to stay here with your men, round the empty cart, as long as you can. Reinforcements have been sent for, and must soon be here. When they arrive you are to move along with the cart, as if you were making for the Luxembourg Prison. This manœuvre will give us time to deliver the prisoners safely at the Temple."

The man spoke hurriedly and peremptorily, and Santerre was only too ready to obey. He felt relieved at thought of reinforcements, and glad to be rid of the responsibility of conducting such troublesome prisoners.

The thick mist, which grew more and more dense, favoured the new manœuvre, and the constant roll of drums drowned the hastily given orders.

The cart was drawn back into the deepest shadow of the great portico, and whilst the mob were howling their loudest, and yelling out frantic demands for the traitors, Déroulède and Juliette were summarily ordered to step out of the cart. No one saw them, for the darkness here was intense.

"Follow quietly!" whispered a raucous voice in their ears as they did so, "or my orders are to shoot you where you stand."

But neither of them had any wish for resistance. Juliette, cold and numb, was clinging to Déroulède, who had placed a protecting arm round her.

Santerre had told off two of his men to join the new escort of the prisoners, and presently the small party, skirting the walls of the Palais de Justice, began to walk rapidly away from the scene of the riot.

Déroulède noted that some half-dozen men seemed to be surrounding him and Juliette, but the drizzling rain blurred every outline. The blackness of the night too had become absolutely dense, and in the distance the cries of the populace grew more and more faint.

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THE UNEXPECTED

The small party walked on in silence. It seemed to consist of a very few men of the National Guard, whom Santerre had placed under the command of the soldier who had transmitted to him the orders of the Citizen-Deputies.

Juliette and Déroulède both vaguely wondered whither they were being led; to some other prison mayhap, away from the fury of the populace. They were conscious of a sense of satisfaction at thought of being freed from that pack of raging wild beasts.

Beyond that they cared nothing.

Both felt already the shadow of death hovering over them. The supreme moment of their lives had come, and had found them side by side.

What neither fear nor remorse, sorrow nor joy, could do, that the great and mighty Shadow accomplished in a trice.

Juliette, looking death bravely in the face, held out her hand, and sought that of the man she loved.

There was not one word spoken between them, not even a murmur.

Déroulède, with the unerring instinct of his own unselfish passion, understood all that the tiny hand wished to convey to him.

In a moment everything was forgotten save the joy of this touch. Death, or the fear of death, had ceased to exist. Life was beautiful, and in the soul of these two human creatures there was perfect peace, almost perfect happiness.

With one grasp of the hand they had sought and found one another's soul. What mattered the yelling crowd, the noise and tumult of this sordid world? They had found one another, and, hand-in-hand, shoulder-to-shoulder, they had gone off wandering into the land of dreams, where dwelt neither doubt nor treachery, where there was nothing to forgive.

He no longer said: "She does not love me—would she have betrayed me else?" He felt the clinging, trustful touch of her hand, and knew that, with all her faults, her great sin and her lasting sorrow, her woman's heart, Heaven's most priceless treasure, was indeed truly his.

And she knew that he had forgiven—nay, that he had naught to forgive—for Love is sweet and tender, and judges not. Love is Love—whole, trustful, passionate. Love is perfect understanding and perfect peace.

And so they followed their escort whithersoever it chose to lead them.

Their eyes wandered aimlessly over the mist-laden landscape of this portion of deserted Paris. They had turned away from the river now, and were following the Rue des Arts. Close by on the right was the dismal little hostelry, "La Cruche Cassée," where Sir Percy Blakeney lived. Déroulède, as they neared the place, caught himself vaguely wondering what had become of his English friend.

But it would take more than the ingenuity of the Scarlet Pimpernel to get two noted prisoners out of Paris to-day. Even if——

"Halt!"

The word of command rang out clearly and distinctly through the rain-soaked atmosphere.

Déroulède threw up his head and listened. Something strange and unaccountable in that same word of command had struck his sensitive ear.

Yet the party had halted, and there was a click as of bayonets or muskets levelled ready to fire.

All had happened in less than a few seconds. The next moment there was a loud cry:

"À moi, Déroulède! 'tis the Scarlet Pimpernel!"

A vigorous blow from an unseen hand had knocked down and extinguished the nearest street lantern.

Déroulède felt that he and Juliette were being hastily dragged under an adjoining doorway even as the cheery voice echoed along the narrow street.

Half a dozen men were struggling below in the mud, and there was a plentiful supply of honest English oaths. It looked as if the men of the National Guard had fallen upon one another, and had it not been for these same English oaths perhaps Déroulède and Juliette would have been slower to understand.

"Well done, Tony! Gadzooks, Ffoulkes, that was a smart bit of work!"

The lazy, pleasant voice was unmistakable, but, God in heaven! where did it come from?

Of one thing there could be no doubt. The two men despatched by Santerre were lying disabled on the ground, whilst three other soldiers were busy pinioning them with ropes.

What did it all mean?

"La, friend Déroulède! you had not thought, I trust, that I would leave Mademoiselle Juliette in such a demmed uncomfortable hole?"

And there, close beside Déroulède and Juliette, stood the tall figure of the Jacobin orator, the bloodthirsty Citizen Lenoir. The two young people gazed and gazed, then looked again, dumbfounded, hardly daring to trust their vision, for through the grime-covered mask of the gigantic coal-heaver a pair of merry blue eyes was regarding them with lazy amusement.

"La! I do look a miserable object, I know," said the pseudo coal-heaver at last, "but 'twas the only way to get those murderous devils to do what I wanted. A thousand pardons, mademoiselle; 'twas I brought you to such a terrible pass, but la! you are amongst friends now. Will you deign to forgive me?"

Juliette looked up. Her great, earnest eyes, now swimming in tears, sought those of the brave man who had so nobly stood by her and the man she loved.

"Blakeney——" began Déroulède.

But Sir Percy quickly interrupted him:

"Hush, man! we have but a few moments. Remember you are in Paris still, and the Lord only knows how we shall all get out of this murderous city to-night. I have said that you and mademoiselle are among friends. That is all for the moment. I had to get you together, or I should have failed. I could only succeed by subjecting you and mademoiselle to terrible indignities. Our League could plan but one rescue, and I had to adopt the best means at my command to have you condemned and led away together. Faith!" he added, with a pleasant laugh, "my friend Tinville will not be pleased when he realizes that Citizen Lenoir has dragged the Citizen-Deputies by the nose."

Whilst he spoke he had led Déroulède and Juliette into a dark and narrow room on the ground floor of the hostelry, and presently he called loudly for Brogard, the host of this uninviting abode.

"Brogard!" shouted Sir Percy. "Where is that ass Brogard? La! man," he added as Citizen Brogard, obsequious and fussy, and with pockets stuffed with English gold, came shuffling along, "where do you hide your engaging countenance? Here! another length of rope for the gallant soldiers. Bring them in here, then give them that potion down their throats, as I have prescribed. Demm it! I wish we need not have brought them along, but that devil Santerre might have been suspicious, else. They'll come to no harm, though, and can do us no mischief."

He prattled along merrily. Innately kind and chivalrous, he wished to give Déroulède and Juliette time to recover from their dazed surprise.

The transition from dull despair to buoyant hope had been so sudden: it had all happened in less than three minutes.

The scuffle had been short and sudden outside. The two soldiers of Santerre had been taken completely unawares, and the three young lieutenants of the Scarlet Pimpernel had fallen on them with such vigour that they had hardly had time to utter a cry of "Help!"

Moreover, that cry would have been useless. The night was dark and wet, and those citizens who felt ready for excitement were busy mobbing the Hall of Justice, a mile and a half away. One or two heads had appeared at the small windows of the squalid houses opposite, but it was too dark to see anything, and the scuffle had very quickly subsided.

All was silent now in the Rue des Arts, and in the grimy coffee-room of the Cruche Cassée two soldiers of the National Guard were lying bound and gagged, whilst three others were gaily laughing, and wiping their rain-soaked hands and faces.

In the midst of them all stood the tall, athletic figure of the bold adventurer who had planned this impudent coup.

"La! we've got so far, friends, haven't we?" he said cheerily, "and now for the immediate future.

We must all be out of Paris to-night, or the guillotine for the lot of us to-morrow."

He spoke gaily, and with that pleasant drawl of his which was so well known in the fashionable assemblies of London; but there was a ring of earnestness in his voice, and his lieutenants looked up at him, ready to obey him in all things, but aware that danger was looming threateningly ahead.

Lord Antony Dewhurst, Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, and Lord Hastings, dressed as soldiers of the National Guard, had played their part to perfection. Lord Hastings had presented the order to Santerre, and the three young bucks, at the word of command from their chief, had fallen upon and overpowered the two men whom the commandant of Paris had despatched to look after the prisoners.

So far all was well. But how to get out of Paris? Every one looked to the Scarlet Pimpernel for guidance.

Sir Percy now turned to Juliette, and with the consummate grace which the elaborate etiquette of the times demanded, he made her a courtly bow.

"Mademoiselle de Marny," he said, "allow me to conduct you to a room, which though unworthy of your presence will, nevertheless, enable you to rest quietly for a few minutes, whilst I give my friend Déroulède further advice and instructions. In the room you will find a disguise, which I pray you to don with all haste. La! they are filthy rags, I own, but your life and—and ours depend upon your help."

Gallantly he kissed the tips of her fingers, and opened the door of an adjoining room to enable her to pass through; then he stood aside, so that her final look, as she went, might be for Déroulède.

As soon as the door had closed upon her he once more turned to the men.

"Those uniforms will not do now," he said peremptorily; "there are bundles of abominable clothes here, Tony. Will you all don them as quickly as you can? We must all look as filthy a band of sansculottes to-night as ever walked the streets of Paris."

His lazy drawl had deserted him now. He was the man of action and of thought, the bold adventurer who held the lives of his friends in the hollow of his hand.

The four men hastily obeyed. Lord Antony Dewhurst—one of the most elegant dandies of London society—had brought forth from a dank cupboard a bundle of clothes, mere rags, filthy but useful.

Within ten minutes the change was accomplished, and four dirty, slouchy figures stood confronting their chief.

"That's capital!" said Sir Percy merrily. "Now for Mademoiselle de Marny."

Hardly had he spoken when the door of the adjoining room was pushed open, and a horrible apparition stood before them. A woman in filthy bodice and skirt, with face covered in grime, her yellow hair, matted and greasy, thrust under a dirty and crumpled cap.

A shout of rapturous delight greeted this uncanny apparition.

Juliette, like the true woman she was, had found all her energy and spirits now that she felt that she had an important part to play. She woke from her dream to realize that noble friends had risked their lives for the man she loved and for her.

Of herself she did not think; she only remembered that her presence of mind, her physical and mental strength, would be needed to carry the rescue to a successful end.

Therefore with the rags of a Paris *tricotteuse* she had also donned her personality. She played her part valiantly, and one look at the perfection of her disguise was sufficient to assure the leader of this band of heroes that his instructions would be carried through to the letter.

Déroulède too now looked the ragged *sansculotte* to the life, with bare and muddy feet, frayed breeches, and shabby, black-shag spencer. The four men stood waiting together with Juliette, whilst Sir Percy gave them his final instructions.

"We'll mix with the crowd," he said, "and do all that the crowd does. It is for us to see that that unruly crowd does what we want. Mademoiselle de Marny, a thousand congratulations. I entreat you to take hold of my friend Déroulède's hand, and not to let go of it, on any pretext whatever. La! not a difficult task, I ween," he added, with his genial smile; "and yours, Déroulède, is equally easy. I enjoin you to take charge of Mademoiselle Juliette, and on no account to leave her side until we are out of Paris."

"Out of Paris!" echoed Déroulède with a troubled sigh.

"Aye!" rejoined Sir Percy boldly; "out of Paris! with a howling mob at our heels causing the authorities to take double precautions. And above all, remember, friends, that our rallying cry is the shrill call of the sea-mew thrice repeated. Follow it until you are outside the gates of Paris. Once there, listen for it again; it will lead you to freedom and safety at last. Aye! Outside Paris, by the grace of God."

The hearts of his hearers thrilled as they heard him. Who could help but follow this brave and gallant adventurer, with the magic voice and the noble bearing?

"And now en route!" said Blakeney finally, "that ass Santerre will have dispersed the pack of yelling hyenas with his cavalry by now. They'll to the Temple Prison to find their prey; we'll in their wake. À moi, friends! and remember the sea-gull's cry."

Déroulède drew Juliette's hand in his.

"We are ready," he said; "and God bless the Scarlet Pimpernel."

Then the five men, with Juliette in their midst, went out into the street once more.

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PÈRE LACHAISE

It was not difficult to guess which way the crowd had gone; yells, hoots, and hoarse cries could be heard from the farther side of the river.

Citizen Santerre had been unable to keep the mob back until the arrival of the cavalry reinforcements. Within five minutes of the abduction of Déroulède and Juliette the crowd had broken through the line of soldiers, and had stormed the cart, only to find it empty, and the prey disappeared.

"They are safe in the Temple by now!" shouted Santerre hoarsely, in savage triumph at seeing them all baffled.

At first it seemed as if the wrath of the infuriated populace, fooled in its lust for vengeance, would vent itself against the commandant of Paris and his soldiers; for a moment even Santerre's ruddy cheeks had paled at the sudden vision of this unlooked for danger.

Then just as suddenly the cry was raised.

"To the Temple!"

"To the Temple! To the Temple!" came in ready response.

The cry was soon taken up by the entire crowd, and in less than two minutes the purlieus of the Hall of Justice were deserted, and the Pont St. Michel, then the Cité and the Pont au Change, swarmed with the rioters. Thence along the north bank of the river, and up the Rue du Temple, the people still yelling, muttering, singing the "Ça ira," and shouting: "À la lanterne! À la lanterne!"

Sir Percy Blakeney and his little band of followers had found the Pont Neuf and the adjoining streets pratically deserted. A few stragglers from the crowd, soaked through with the rain, their enthusiasm damped, and their throats choked with the mist, were sulkily returning to their homes.

The desultory group of six *sansculottes* attracted little or no attention, and Sir Percy boldly challenged every passer-by.

"The way to the Rue du Temple, citizen?" he asked once or twice, or:

"Have they hung the traitor yet? Can you tell me, citizeness?"

A grunt or an oath were the usual replies, but no one took any further notice of the gigantic coal-heaver and his ragged friends.

At the corner of one of the cross-streets, between the Rue du Temple and the Rue des Archives, Sir Percy Blakeney suddenly turned to his followers:

"We are close to the rabble now," he said in a whisper, and speaking in English; "do you all follow the nearest stragglers, and get as soon as possible into the thickest of the crowd. We'll meet again outside the prison—and remember the sea-gull's cry."

He did not wait for an answer, and presently disappeared in the mist.

Already a few stragglers, hangers-on of the multitude, were gradually coming into view, and the yells could be distinctly heard. The mob had evidently assembled in the great square outside the prison, and was loudly demanding the object of its wrath.

The moment for cool-headed action was at hand. The Scarlet Pimpernel had planned the whole thing, but it was for his followers and for those whom he was endeavouring to rescue from certain death, to help him heart and soul.

Déroulède's grasp tightened on Juliette's little hand.

"Are you frightened, my beloved?" he whispered.

"Not whilst you are near me," she murmured in reply.

A few more minutes' walk up the Rue des Archives and they were in the thick of the crowd. Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, Lord Antony Dewhurst, and Lord Hastings, the three Englishmen, were in front; Déroulède and Juliette immediately behind them.

The mob itself now carried them along. A motley throng they were, soaked through with the rain, drunk with their own baffled rage. and with the brandy which they had imbibed.

Every one was shouting; the women louder than the rest; one of them was dragging the length of rope, which might still be useful.

"Ça ira! ça ira! À la lanterne! À la lanterne! les traîtres!"

And Déroulède, holding Juliette by the hand, shouted lustily with them:

"Ça ira!"

Sir Andrew Ffoulkes turned, and laughed. It was rare sport for these young bucks, and they all entered into the spirit of the situation. They all shouted "À la lanterne!" egging and encouraging those around them.

Déroulède and Juliette felt the intoxication of the adventure. They were drunk with the joy of their reunion, and seized with the wild, mad, passionate desire for freedom and for life . . . Life and love!

So they pushed and jostled on in the mud, followed the crowd, sang and yelled louder than any of them. Was not that very crowd the great bulwark of their safety?

As well have sought for the proverbial needle in the haystack, as for two escaped prisoners in this mad, heaving throng.

The large open space in front of the Temple Prison looked like one great, seething, black mass.

The darkness was almost thick here, the ground like a morass, with inches of clayey mud, which stuck to everything, whilst the sparse lanterns, hung to the prison walls and beneath the portico, threw practically no light into the square.

As the little band, composed of the three Englishmen, and of Déroulède, holding Juliette by the hand, emerged into the open space, they heard a strident cry, like that of a sea-mew thrice repeated, and a hoarse voice shouting from out the darkness:

"Ma foi! I'll not believe that the prisoners are in the Temple now! It is my belief, friends, citizens, that we have been fooled once more!"

The voice, with its strange, unaccountable accent, which seemed to belong to no province of France, dominated the almost deafening noise; it penetrated through, even into the brandy-soddened minds of the multitude, for the suggestion was received with renewed shouts of the wildest wrath.

Like one great, living, seething mass the crowd literally bore down upon the huge and frowning prison. Pushing, jostling, yelling, the women screaming, the men cursing, it seemed as if that awesome day—the 14th of July—was to have its sanguinary counterpart to-night, as if the Temple were destined to share the fate of the Bastille.

Obedient to their leader's orders the three young Englishmen remained in the thick of the crowd: together with Déroulède they contrived to form a sturdy rampart round Juliette, effectually protecting her against rough buffetings.

On their right, towards the direction of Ménilmontant, the sea-mew's cry at intervals gave them strength and courage.

The foremost rank of the crowd had reached the portico of the building, and, with howls and snatches of their gutter song, were loudly clamouring for the guardian of the grim prison.

No one appeared; the great gates with their massive bars and hinges remained silent and defiant.

The crowd was becoming dangerous: whispers of the victory of the Bastille, five years ago, engendered thoughts of pillage and of arson.

Then the strident voice was heard again:

"Pardi! the prisoners are not in the Temple! The dolts have allowed them to escape, and now are afraid of the wrath of the people!"

It was strange how easily the mob assimilated this new idea. Perhaps the dark, frowning block of massive buildings had overawed them with its peaceful strength, perhaps the dripping rain and oozing clay had damped their desire for an immediate storming of the grim citadel; perhaps it was merely the human characteristic of a wish for something new, something unexpected.

Be that as it may, the cry was certainly taken up with marvellous, quick-change rapidity.

"The prisoners have escaped! The prisoners have escaped!"

Some were for proceeding with the storming of the Temple, but they were in the minority. All along, the crowd had been more inclined for private revenge than for martial deeds of valour; the Bastille had been taken by daylight; the effort might not have been so successful on a pitch-black night such as this, when one could not see one's hand before one's eyes, and the drizzling rain went through to the marrow.

"They've got through one of the barriers by now!" suggested the same voice from out the darkness.

"The barriers—the barriers!" came in sheep-like echo from the crowd.

The little group of fugitives and their friends tightened their hold on one another.

They had understood at last.

"It is for us to see that the crowd does what we want," the Scarlet Pimpernel had said.

He wanted it to take him and his friends out of Paris, and, by God! he was like to succeed.

Juliette's heart within her beat almost to choking; her strong little hand gripped Déroulède's fingers with the wild strength of a mad exultation.

Next to the man to whom she had given her love and her very soul she admired and looked up to the remarkable and noble adventurer, the high-born and exquisite dandy, who with grime-covered face, and strong limbs encased in filthy clothes, was playing the most glorious part ever enacted upon the stage.

"To the barriers—to the barriers!"

Like a herd of wild horses, driven by the whip of the herdsmen, the mob began to scatter in all directions. Not knowing what it wanted, not knowing what it would find, half forgetting the very cause and object of its wrath, it made one gigantic rush for the gates of the great city through which the prisoners were supposed to have escaped.

The three Englishmen and Déroulède, with Juliette well protected in their midst, had not joined the general onrush as yet. The crowd in the open place was still very thick, the outward-branching streets were very narrow: through these the multitude, scampering, hurrying, scurrying, like a human torrent let out of a whirlpool, rushed down headlong towards the barriers.

Up the Rue Turbigo to the Belleville gate, the Rue des Filles, and the Rue du Chemin Vert, towards Popincourt, they ran, knocking each other down, jostling the weaker ones on one side, trampling others underfoot. They were all rough, coarse creatures, accustomed to these wild bousculades, ready to pick themselves up again after any number of falls; whilst the mud was slimy and soft to tumble on, and those who did the trampling had no shoes on their feet.

They rushed out from the dark, open places, these creatures of the night, into streets darker still.

On they ran—on! on!—now in thick, heaving masses, anon in loose, straggling groups—some north, some south, some east, some west.

But it was from the east that came the sea-gull's cry.

The little band ran boldly towards the east. Down the Rue de la Republique they followed their leader's call. The crowd was very thick here; the Barrière Ménilmontant was close by, and beyond it there was the cemetery of Père Lachaise. It was the nearest gate to the Temple Prison, and the mob wanted to be up and doing, not to spend too much time running along the muddy streets and getting wet and cold, but to repeat the glorious exploits of the 14th of July, and capture the barriers of Paris by force of will rather than force of arms.

In this rushing mob the four men, with Juliette in their midst, remained quite unchallenged, mere units in an unruly crowd.

In a quarter of an hour Ménilmontant was reached.

The great gates of the city were well guarded by detachments of the National Guard, each under command of an officer. Twenty strong at most—what was that against such a throng?

Who had ever dreamed of Paris being stormed from within?

At every gate to the north and east of the city there was now a rabble some four or five thousand strong, wanting it knew not what. Every one had forgotten what it was that caused him or her to rush on so blindly, so madly, towards the nearest barrier.

But every one knew that he or she wanted to get through that barrier, to attack the soldiery, to knock down the Captain of the Guard.

And with a wild cry every city gate was stormed.

Like one huge wind-tossed wave, the populace on that memorable night of Fructidor, broke against the cordon of soldiery that vainly tried to keep it back. Men and women, drunk with brandy and exultation, shouted "Quatorze Juillet!" and amidst curses and threats demanded the opening of the gates.

The people of France *would* have its will.

Was it not the supreme lord and ruler of the land, the arbiter of the Fate of this great, beautiful, and maddened country?

The National Guard was powerless; the officers in command could offer but feeble resistance.

The desultory fire, which in the darkness and the pouring rain did very little harm, had the effect of further infuriating the mob.

The drizzle had turned to a deluge, a veritable heavy summer downpour, with occasional distant claps of thunder and incessant sheet-lightning, which ever and anon illumined with its weird, fantastic flash this heaving throng, these begrimed faces, crowned with red caps of Liberty, these witchlike female creatures with wet, straggly hair and gaunt, menacing arms.

Within half an hour the people of Paris was outside its own gates.

Victory was complete. The Guard did not resist; the officers had surrendered; the great and mighty rabble had had its way.

Exultant, it swarmed around the fortifications and along the *terrains vagues* which it had conquered by its will.

But the downpour was continuous, and with victory came satiety—satiety coupled with wet skins, muddy feet, tired, wearied bodies, and throats parched with continual shouting.

At Ménilmontant, where the crowd had been thickest, the tempers highest, and the yells most strident, there now stretched before this tired, excited throng, the peaceful vastness of the cemetery of Père Lachaise.

The great alleys of sombre monuments, the weird cedars with their fantastic branches, like arms of a hundred ghosts, quelled and awed these hooting masses of degraded humanity.

The silent majesty of this city of the dead seemed to frown with withering scorn on the passions of the sister city.

Instinctively the rabble was cowed. The cemetery looked dark, dismal, and deserted. The flashes of lightning seemed to reveal ghostlike processions of the departed heroes of France, wandering silently amidst the tombs.

And the populace turned with a shudder away from this vast place of eternal peace.

From within the cemetery gates there was suddenly heard the sound of a sea-mew calling thrice to its mate. And five dark figures, wrapped in cloaks, gradually detached themselves from the throng, and one by one slipped into the grounds of Père Lachaise through that break in the wall which is quite close to the main entrance.

Once more the sea-gull's cry.

Those in the crowd who heard it, shivered beneath their dripping clothes. They thought it was a soul in pain risen from one of the graves, and some of the women, forgetting the last few years of godlessness, hastily crossed themselves, and muttered an invocation to the Virgin Mary.

Within the gates all was silent and at peace. The sodden earth gave forth no echo of the muffled footsteps, which slowly crept towards the massive block of stone, which covers the graves of the immortal lovers—Abélard and Helöise.

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CONCLUSION

THERE is but little else to record.

History has told us how, shamefaced, tired, dripping, the great, all-powerful people of Paris quietly slunk back to their homes, even before the first cock-crow in the villages beyond the gates acclaimed the pale streak of dawn.

But long before that, even before the church bells of the great city had tolled the midnight hour, Sir Percy Blakeney and his little band of followers had reached the little tavern which stands close to the farthest gate of Père Lachaise.

Without a word, like six silent ghosts, they had traversed the vast cemetery, and reached the quiet hostelry, where the sounds of the seething revolution only came, attenuated by their passage through the peaceful city of the dead.

English gold had easily purchased silence and good will from the half-starved keeper of this wayside inn. A huge travelling chaise already stood in readiness, and four good Flanders horses had been pawing the ground impatiently for the past half-hour. From the window of the chaise old Pétronelle's face, wet with anxious tears, was peering anxiously.

A cry of joy and surprise escaped Déroulède and Juliette, and both turned, with a feeling akin to awe, towards the wonderful man who had planned and carried through this bold adventure.

"Nay, my friend," said Sir Percy, speaking more especially to Déroulède; "if you only knew how simple it all was! Gold can do so many things, and my only merit seems to be the possession of plenty of that commodity. You told me yourself how you had provided for old Pétronelle. Under the most solemn assurance that she would meet her young mistress here, I got her to leave Paris. She came out most bravely this morning in one of the market carts. She is so obviously a woman of the people that no one suspected her. As for the worthy couple who keep this wayside hostel, they have been well paid, and money soon procures a chaise and horses. My English friends and I, we have our own passports, and one for Mademoiselle Juliette, who must travel as an English lady, with her old nurse, Pétronelle. There are some decent clothes in readiness for us all in the inn. A quarter of an hour in which to don them and we must on our way. You can use your own passport, of course; your arrest has been so very sudden that it has not yet been cancelled, and we have an eight hours' start of our enemies. They'll wake up to-morrow morning, begad! and find that you have slipped through their fingers."

He spoke with easy carelessness, and that slow drawl of his, as if he were talking airy nothings in a London drawing-room, instead of recounting the most daring, most colossal piece of effrontery the adventurous brain of man could conceive.

Déroulède could say nothing. His own noble heart was too full of gratitude towards his friend to express it all in a few words.

And time, of course, was precious.

Within the prescribed quarter of an hour the little band of heroes had doffed their grimy, ragged clothes and now appeared dressed as respectable bourgeois of Paris *en route* for the country. Sir Percy Blakeney had donned the livery of a coachman of a well-to-do house, whilst Lord Antony Dewhurst wore that of an English lackey.

Five minutes later Déroulède had lifted Juliette into the travelling chaise, and in spite of fatigue, of anxiety, and emotion, it was immeasurable happiness to feel her arm encircling his shoulders in perfect joy and trust.

Sir Andrew Ffoulkes and Lord Hastings joined them inside the chaise; Lord Antony sat next to Sir Percy on the box.

And whilst the crowd of Paris was still wondering why it had stormed the gates of the city, the escaped prisoners were borne along the muddy roads of France at breakneck speed northward to the coast.

Sir Percy Blakeney held the reins himself. With his noble heart full of joy, the gallant adventurer himself drove his friends to safety.

They had an eight hours' start, and the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel had done its work thoroughly: well provided with passports, and with relays awaiting them at every station of fifty miles or so, the journey, though wearisome, was free from further adventure.

At Le Havre the little party embarked on board Sir Percy Blakeney's yacht the *Day Dream*, where they met Madame Déroulède and Anne Mie.

The two ladies, acting under the instructions of Sir Percy, had, as originally arranged, pursued their journey northwards, to the populous seaport town.

Anne Mie's first meeting with Juliette was intensely pathetic. The poor little cripple had spent the last few days in an agony of remorse, whilst the heavy travelling chaise bore her farther and farther away from Paris.

She thought Juliette dead, and Paul a prey to despair, and her tender soul ached when she remembered that it was she who had given the final deadly stab to the heart of the man she loved.

Hers was the nature born to abnegation: aye! and one destined to find bliss therein. And when one glance in Paul Déroulède's face told her that she was forgiven, her cup of joy at seeing him happy beside his beloved was unalloyed with any bitterness.

It was in the beautiful, rosy dawn of one of the last days of that memorable Fructidor, when Juliette and Paul Déroulède, standing on the deck of the *Day Dream*, saw the shores of France gradually receding from their view.

Déroulède's arm was round his beloved, her golden hair, fanned by the breeze, brushed lightly against his cheek.

"Madonna!" he murmured.

She turned her head to him. It was the first time that they were quite alone, the first time that all thought of danger had become a mere dream.

What had the future in store for them, in that beautiful, strange land to which the graceful yacht was swiftly bearing them.

England, the land of freedom, would shelter their happiness and their joy; and they looked out towards the North, where lay, still hidden in the arms of the distant horizon, the white cliffs of Albion, whilst the mist even now was wrapping in its obliterating embrace the shores of the land where they had both suffered, where they had both learned to love.

He took her in his arms.

"My wife!" he whispered.

The rosy light touched her golden hair; he raised her face to his, and soul met soul in one long, passionate kiss.

THIRD NOVEL

"IS HE IN HEAVEN?—IS HE IN HELL?"

INTRODUCTION

There has of late years crept so much confusion into the mind of the student as well as of the general reader as to the identity of the Scarlet Pimpernel with that of the Gascon Royalist plotter known to history as the Baron de Batz, that the time seems opportune for setting all doubts on that subject at rest.

The identity of the Scarlet Pimpernel is in no way whatever connected with that of the Baron de Batz, and even superficial reflection will soon bring the mind to the conclusion that great fundamental differences existed in these two men, in their personality, in their character, and, above all, in their aims.

According to one or two enthusiastic historians, the Baron de Batz was the chief agent in a vast network of conspiracy, entirely supported by foreign money—both English and Austrian—and which had for its object the overthrow of the Republican Government and the restoration of the monarchy in France.

In order to attain this political goal, it is averred that he set himself the task of pitting the members of the revolutionary Government one against the other, and bringing hatred and dissensions amongst them, until the cry of "Traitor!" resounded from one end of the Assembly of the Convention to the other, and the Assembly itself became as one vast den of wild beasts wherein wolves and hyenas devoured one another and, still unsatiated, licked their streaming jaws hungering for more prey.

Those same enthusiastic historians, who have a firm belief in the so-called "Foreign Conspiracy," ascribe every important event of the Great Revolution—be that event the downfall of the Girondins, the escape of the Dauphin from the Temple, or the death of Robespierre—to the intrigues of Baron de Batz. He it was, so they say, who egged the Jacobins on against the Mountain, Robespierre against Danton, Hébert against Robespierre. He it was who instigated the massacres of September, the atrocities of Nantes, the horrors of Thermidor, the sacrileges, the *noyades*: all with the view of causing each section of the National Assembly to vie with the other in excesses and in cruelty, until the makers of the Revolution, satiated with their own lust, turned on one another, and Sardanapalus-like buried themselves and their orgies in the vast hecatomb of a self-consumed anarchy.

Whether the power thus ascribed to Baron de Batz by his historians is real or imaginary it is not the purpose of this preface to investigate. Its sole object is to point out the difference between the career of this plotter and that of the Scarlet Pimpernel.

The Baron de Batz himself was an adventurer without substance, save that which he derived from abroad. He was one of those men who have nothing to lose and everything to gain by throwing themselves headlong in the seething cauldron of internal politics. Though he made several attempts at rescuing King Louis first, and then the Queen and Royal Family from prison and from death, he never succeeded, as we know, in any of these undertakings, and he never once so much as attempted the rescue of other equally innocent, if not quite so distinguished, victims of the most bloodthirsty revolution that has ever shaken the foundations of the civilized world.

Nay more; when on the 29th Prairial those unfortunate men and women were condemned and executed for alleged complicity in the so-called "Foreign Conspiracy," de Batz, who is universally admitted to have been the head and prime-mover of that conspiracy—if, indeed, conspiracy there was—never made either the slightest attempt to rescue his confederates from the guillotine, or at least the offer to perish by their side if he could not succeed in saving them.

And when we remember that the martyrs of the 29th Prairial included women like Grandmaison, the devoted friend of de Batz, the beautiful Emilie de St. Amaranthe, little Cécile Renault—a mere child not sixteen years of age—also men like Michonis and Roussell, faithful servants of de Batz, the Baron de Lézardière, and the Comte de St. Maurice, his friends, we no longer can have the slightest doubt that the Gascon plotter and the English gentleman are indeed two very different persons.

The latter's aims were absolutely non-political. He never intrigued for the restoration of the monarchy, or even for the overthrow of that Republic which he loathed.

His only concern was the rescue of the innocent, the stretching out of a saving hand to those unfortunate creatures who had fallen into the nets spread out for them by their fellow-men; by those who—godless, lawless, penniless themselves—had sworn to exterminate all those who clung to their belongings, to their religion, and to their beliefs.

The Scarlet Pimpernel did not take it upon himself to punish the guilty; his care was solely of the helpless and of the innocent.

For this aim he risked his life every time that he set foot on French soil, for it he sacrificed his fortune, and even his personal happiness, and to it he devoted his entire existence.

Moreover, whereas the French plotter is said to have had confederates even in the Assembly of the Convention, confederates who were sufficiently influential and powerful to secure his own immunity, the Englishman when he was bent on his errands of mercy had the whole of France against him.

The Baron de Batz was a man who never justified either his own ambitions or even his existence; the Scarlet Pimpernel was a personality of whom an entire nation might justly be proud.

PART I

1

IN THE THÉÂTRE NATIONAL

AND yet people found the opportunity to amuse themselves, to dance and to go to the theatre, to enjoy music and open-air cafés and promenades in the Palais Royal.

New fashions in dress made their appearance, milliners produced fresh "creations," and jewellers were not idle. A grim sense of humour, born of the very intensity of ever-present danger, had dubbed the cut of certain tunics *tête tranchée*, or a favourite *ragoût* was called *à la guillotine*.

On three evenings only during the past memorable four and a half years did the theatres close their doors, and these evenings were the ones immediately following that terrible 2nd of September—the day of the butchery outside the Abbaye Prison, when Paris herself was aghast with horror, and the cries of the massacred might have drowned the calls of the audience whose hands upraised for plaudits would still be dripping with blood.

On all other evenings of these same four and a half years the theatres in the Rue de Richelieu, in the Palais Royal, the Luxembourg, and others, had raised their curtains and taken money at their doors. The same audience that earlier in the day had whiled away the time by witnessing the ever-recurrent dramas of the

Place de la Révolution assembled here in the evenings and filled stalls, boxes, and tiers, laughing over the satires of Voltaire or weeping over the sentimental tragedies of persecuted Romeos and innocent Juliets.

Death knocked at so many doors these days! He was so constant a guest in the houses of relatives and friends that those who had merely shaken him by the hand, those on whom he had smiled, and whom he, still smiling, had passed indulgently by, looked on him with that subtle contempt born of familiarity, shrugged their shoulders at his passage, and envisaged his probable visit on the morrow with light-hearted indifference.

Paris—despite the horrors that had stained her walls—had remained a city of pleasure, and the knife of the guillotine did scarce descend more often than did the drop-scenes on the stage.

On this bitterly cold evening of the 27th Nivôse, in the second year of the Republic—or, as we of the old style still persist in calling it, the 16th of January, 1794—the auditorium of the Théâtre National was filled with a very brilliant company.

The appearance of a favourite actress in the part of one of Molière's volatile heroines had brought pleasure-loving Paris to witness this revival of "Le Misanthrope," with new scenery, dresses, and the aforesaid charming actress to add piquancy to the master's mordant wit.

The *Moniteur*, which so impartially chronicles the events of those times, tells us under that date that the Assembly of the Convention voted on that same day a new law giving fuller power to its spies, enabling them to effect domiciliary searches at their discretion without previous reference to the Committee of General Security, authorizing them to proceed against all enemies of public happiness, to send them to prison at their own discretion, and assuring them the sum of thirty-five livres "for every piece of game thus beaten up for the guillotine." Under that same date the *Moniteur* also puts it on record that the Théâtre National was filled to its utmost capacity for the revival of the late citoyen Molière's comedy.

The Assembly of the Convention having voted the law which placed the lives of thousands at the mercy of a few human bloodhounds, adjourned its sitting and proceeded to the Rue de Richelieu.

Already the house was full when the fathers of the people made their way to the seats which had been reserved for them. An awed hush descended on the throng as one by one the men whose very names inspired horror and dread filed in through the narrow gangways of the stalls or took their places in the tiny boxes around.

Citizen Robespierre's neatly bewigged head soon appeared in one of these; his bosom friend St. Just was with him, and also his sister Charlotte; Danton, like a big, shaggy-coated lion, elbowed his way into the stalls, whilst Santerre, the handsome butcher and idol of the people of Paris, was loudly acclaimed as his huge frame, gorgeously clad in the uniform of the National Guard, was sighted on one of the tiers above.

The public in the parterre and in the galleries whispered excitedly; the awe-inspiring names flew about hither and thither on the wings of the overheated air. Women craned their necks to catch sight of heads which mayhap on the morrow would roll into the gruesome basket at the foot of the guillotine.

In one of the tiny *avant-scène* boxes two men had taken their seats long before the bulk of the audience had begun to assemble in the house. The inside of the box was in complete darkness, and the narrow opening which allowed but a sorry view of one side of the stage helped to conceal rather than display the occupants.

The younger one of these two men appeared to be something of a stranger in Paris, for as the public men and the well-known members of the Government began to arrive he often turned to his companion for information regarding these notorious personalities.

"Tell me, de Batz," he said, calling the other's attention to a group of men who had just entered the house, "that creature there in the green coat—with his hand up to his face now—who is he?"

"Where? Which do you mean?"

"There! He looks this way now, and he has a play-bill in his hand. The man with the protruding chin and the convex forehead, a face like a marmoset, and eyes like a jackal. What?"

The other leaned over the edge of the box, and his small restless eyes wandered over the now closely-packed auditorium.

"Oh!" he said as soon as he recognized the face which his friend had pointed out to him, "that is citizen Foucquier-Tinville."

"The Public Prosecutor?"

"Himself. And Héron is the man next to him."

"Héron?" said the younger man interrogatively.

"Yes. He is chief agent to the Committee of General Security now."

"What does that mean?"

Both leaned back in their chairs, and their sombrely-clad figures were once more merged in the gloom of the narrow box. Instinctively, since the name of the Public Prosecutor had been mentioned between them, they had allowed their voices to sink to a whisper.

The older man—a stoutish, florid-looking individual, with small, keen eyes, and skin pitted with small-pox—shrugged his shoulders at his friend's question, and then said with an air of contemptuous indifference:

"It means, my good St. Just, that these two men whom you see down there, calmly conning the programme of this evening's entertainment, and preparing to enjoy themselves to-night in the company of the late M. de Molière, are two hell-hounds as powerful as they are cunning."

"Yes, yes," said St. Just, and much against his will a slight shudder ran through his slim figure as he spoke. "Foucquier-Tinville I know; I know his cunning, and I know his power—but the other?"

"The other?" retorted de Batz lightly. "Héron? Let me tell you, my friend, that even the might and lust of that damned Public Prosecutor pale before the power of Héron!"

"But how? I do not understand."

"Ah! you have been in England so long, you lucky dog, and though no doubt the main plot of our hideous tragedy has reached your ken, you have no cognizance of the actors who play the principal parts on this arena flooded with blood and carpeted with hate. They come and go, these actors, my good St. Just—they come and go. Marat is already the man of yesterday. Robespierre is the man of to-morrow. To-day we still have Danton and Foucquier-Tinville; we still have Père Duchesne, and your own good cousin Antoine St. Just, but Héron and his like are with us always."

"Spies, of course?"

"Spies," assented the other. "And what spies!

Were you present at the sitting of the Assembly to-day?"

"No."

"I was. I heard the new decree which already has passed into law. Ah! I tell you, friend, that we do not let the grass grow under our feet these days. Robespierre wakes up one morning with a whim; by the afternoon that whim has become law, passed by a servile body of men too terrified to run counter to his will, fearful lest they be accused of moderation or of humanity—the greatest crimes that can be committed nowadays."

"But Danton?"

"Ah! Danton? He would wish to stem the tide that his own passions have let loose; to muzzle the raging beasts whose fangs he himself has sharpened. I told you that Danton is still the man of to-day; to-morrow he will be accused of moderation. Danton and moderation!—ye gods! Eh? Danton, who thought the guillotine too slow in its work, and armed thirty soldiers with swords, so that thirty heads might fall at one and the same time. Danton, friend, will perish to-morrow accused of treachery against the Revolution, of moderation towards her enemies; and curs like Héron will feast on the blood of lions like Danton and his crowd."

He paused a moment, for he dared not raise his voice, and his whispers were being drowned by the noise in the auditorium. The curtain, timed to be raised at eight o'clock was still down, though it was close on half-past, and the public was growing impatient. There was loud stamping of feet, and a few shrill whistles of disapproval proceeded from the gallery.

"If Héron gets impatient," said de Batz lightly, when the noise had momentarily subsided, "the manager of this theatre and mayhap his leading actor and actress will spend an unpleasant day to-morrow."

"Always Héron!" said St. Just, with a contemptuous smile.

"Yes, my friend," rejoined the other imperturbably, "always Héron. And he has even obtained a longer lease of existence this afternoon."

"By the new decree?"

"Yes. The new decree. The agents of the Committee of General Security, of whom Héron is the chief, have from to-day powers of domiciliary search; they have full powers to proceed against all enemies of public welfare. Isn't that beautifully vague? And they have absolute discretion; every one may become an enemy of public welfare, either by spending too much money or by spending too little, by laughing to-day or crying to-morrow, by mourning for one dead relative or rejoicing over the execution of another. He may be a bad example to the public by the cleanliness of his person or by the filth upon his clothes, he may offend by walking to-day and by riding in a carriage next week; the agents of the Committee of General Security shall alone decide what constitutes enmity against public welfare. All prisons are to be opened at their bidding to receive those whom they choose to denounce; they have henceforth the right to examine prisoners privately and without witnesses, and to send them to trial without further warrants; their duty is clear—they must 'beat up game for the guillotine.' Thus is the decree worded; they must furnish the Public Prosecutor with work to do, the tribunals with victims to condemn, the Place de la Révolution with death-scenes to amuse the people, and for their work they will be rewarded thirty-five livres for every head that falls under the guillotine. Ah! if Héron and his like and his myrmidons work hard and well they can make a comfortable income of four or five thousand livres a week. We are getting on, friend St. Just—we are getting on."

He had not raised his voice while he spoke, nor in the recounting of such inhuman monstrosity, such vile and bloodthirsty conspiracy against the liberty, the dignity, the very life of an entire nation did he appear to feel the slightest indignation; rather did a tone of amusement and even of triumph strike through his speech; and now he laughed good-humouredly like an indulgent parent who is watching the naturally cruel antics of a spoilt boy.

"Then from this hell let loose upon earth," exclaimed St. Just hotly, "must we rescue those who refuse to ride upon this tide of blood."

His cheeks were glowing, his eyes sparkling with enthusiasm. He looked very young and very eager. Armand St. Just, the brother of Lady Blakeney, had something of the refined beauty of his lovely sister, but the features—though manly—had not the latent strength expressed in them which characterized every line of Marguerite's exquisite face. The forehead suggested a dreamer rather than a thinker, the blue-grey eyes were those of an idealist rather than of a man of action.

De Batz' keen, piercing eyes had no doubt noted this, even whilst he gazed at his young friend with that same look of good-humoured indulgence which seemed habitual to him.

"We have to think of the future, my good St. Just," he said, after a slight pause, and speaking slowly and decisively, like a father rebuking a hot-headed child, "not of the present. What are a few lives worth beside the great principles which we have at stake?"

"The restoration of the monarchy—I know," retorted St. Just, still unsobered, "but, in the meanwhile——"

"In the meanwhile," rejoined de Batz earnestly, "every victim to the lust of these men is a step towards the restoration of law and order—that is to say, of the monarchy. It is only through these violent excesses perpetrated in its name that the nation will realize how it is being fooled by a set of men who have only their own power and their own advancement in view, and who imagine that the only way to that power is over the dead bodies of those who stand in their way. Once the nation is sickened of these orgies of ambition and of hate, it will turn against these savage brutes, and gladly acclaim the restoration of all that they are striving to destroy. This is our only hope for the future, and, believe me, friend, that every head snatched from the guillotine by your romantic hero, the Scarlet Pimpernel, is a stone laid for the consolidation of this infamous Republic."

"I'll not believe it," protested St. Just emphatically.

De Batz, with a gesture of contempt indicative also of complete self-satisfaction and unalterable self-belief, shrugged his broad shoulders. His short fat fingers, covered with rings, beat a tattoo upon the ledge of the box.

Obviously, he was ready with a retort. His young friend's attitude irritated even more than it amused him. But he said nothing for the moment, waiting while the traditional three knocks on the floor of the stage proclaimed the rise of the curtain. The growing impatience of the audience subsided as if by magic at the welcome call; everybody settled down again comfortably in their seats, they gave up the contemplation of the fathers of the people, and turned their full attention to the actors on the boards.

2

WIDELY DIVERGENT AIMS

This was Armand St. Just's first visit to Paris since that memorable day when first he decided to sever his connection from the Republican party, of which he and his beautiful sister Marguerite had at one time been amongst the most noble, most enthusiastic followers. Already a year and a half ago the excesses of the party had horrified him, and that was long before they had degenerated into the sickening orgies which were culminating to-day in wholesale massacres and bloody hecatombs of innocent victims.

With the death of Mirabeau the moderate Republicans, whose sole and entirely pure aim had been to free the people of France from the autocratic tyranny of the Bourbons, saw the power go from their clean hands to the grimy ones of lustful demagogues, who knew no law save their own passions of bitter hatred against all classes that were not as self-seeking, as ferocious as themselves.

It was no longer a question of a fight for political and religious liberty only, but one of class against class, man against man, and let the weaker look to himself. The weaker had proved himself to be, firstly, the man of property and substance, then the law-abiding citizen, lastly the man of action who had obtained for the people that very same liberty of thought and of belief which soon became so terribly misused.

Armand St. Just, one of the apostles of liberty, fraternity, and equality, soon found that the most savage excesses of tyranny were being perpetrated in the name of those same ideals which he had worshipped.

His sister Marguerite, happily married in England, was the final temptation which caused him to quit the country the destinies of which he no longer could help to control. The spark of enthusiasm which he and the followers of Mirabeau had tried to kindle in the hearts of an oppressed people had turned to raging tongues of unquenchable flames. The taking of the Bastille had been the prelude to the massacres of September, and even the horror of these had since paled beside the holocausts of to-day.

Armand, saved from the swift vengeance of the revolutionaries by the devotion of the Scarlet Pimpernel, crossed over to England and enrolled himself under the banner of the heroic chief. But he had been unable hitherto to be an active member of the League. The chief was loath to allow him to run foolhardy risks. The St. Justs—both Marguerite and Armand—were still very well known in Paris. Marguerite was not a woman easily forgotten and her marriage with an English "aristo" did not please those republican circles who had looked upon her as their queen. Armand's secession from his party into the ranks of the *émigrés* had singled him out for special reprisals, if and whenever he could be got hold of, and both brother and sister had an unusually bitter enemy in their cousin Antoine St. Just—once an aspirant to Marguerite's hand, and now a servile adherent and imitator of Robespierre, whose ferocious cruelty he tried to emulate with a view to ingratiating himself with the most powerful man of the day.

Nothing would have pleased Antoine St. Just more than the opportunity of showing his zeal and his patriotism by denouncing his own kith and kin to the Tribunal of the Terror, and the Scarlet Pimpernel, whose own slender fingers were held on the pulse of that reckless revolution, had no wish to sacrifice Armand's life deliberately, or even to expose it to unnecessary dangers.

Thus it was that more than a year had gone by before Armand St. Just—an enthusiastic member of the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel—was able to do aught for its service. He had chafed under the enforced restraint placed upon him by the prudence of his chief, when, indeed, he was longing to risk his life with the comrades whom he loved and beside the leader whom he revered.

At last, in the beginning of '94 he persuaded Blakeney to allow him to join the next expedition to France. What the principal aim of that expedition was the members of the League did not know as yet, but what they did know was that perils—graver even than hitherto—would attend them on their way.

The circumstances had become very different of late. At first the impenetrable mystery which had surrounded the personality of the chief had been a full measure of safety, but now one tiny corner of that veil of mystery had been lifted by two rough pairs of hands at least; Chauvelin, ex-ambassador at the English Court, was no longer in any doubt as to the identity of Sir Percy Blakeney with the mysterious Scarlet Pimpernel, whilst Collot d'Herbois had seen him at Boulogne, and had there been effectually foiled by him.

Four months had gone by since that day, and the Scarlet Pimpernel was hardly ever out of France now; the massacres in Paris and in the provinces had multiplied with appalling rapidity, the necessity for the selfless devotion of that small band of heroes had become daily, hourly more pressing. They rallied round their chief with unbounded enthusiasm, and let it be admitted at once that the sporting instinct—inherent in these English gentlemen—made them all the more keen, all the more eager now that the dangers which beset their expeditions were increased tenfold.

At a word from the beloved leader, these young men—the spoilt darlings of society—would leave the gaieties, the pleasures, the luxuries of London or of Bath, and, taking their lives in their hands, they placed them, together with their fortunes, and even good names, at the service of the innocent and helpless victims of merciless tyranny. The married men—Ffoulkes, my Lord Hastings, Sir Jeremiah Wallescourt—left wife and children at a call from the chief, at the cry of the wretched. Armand—unattached and enthusiastic—had the right to demand that he should no longer be left behind.

He had only been away a little over fifteen months, and yet he found Paris a different city from the one he had left immediately after the terrible massacres of September. An air of grim loneliness seemed to hang over her despite the crowds that thronged her streets; the men whom he was wont to meet in public places fifteen months ago—friends and political allies—were no longer to be seen; strange faces surrounded him on every side—sullen, glowering faces, all wearing a certain air of horrified surprise and of vague, terrified wonder, as if life had become one awful puzzle, the answer to which must be found in the brief interval between the swift passages of death.

Armand St. Just, having settled his few simple belongings in the squalid lodgings which had been assigned to him, had started out after dark to wander somewhat aimlessly through the streets. Instinctively he seemed to be searching for a familiar face, some one who would come to him out of that merry past which he had spent with Marguerite in their pretty apartment in the Rue St. Honoré.

For an hour he wandered thus and met no one whom he knew. At times it appeared to him as if he did recognize a face or figure that passed him swiftly by in the gloom, but even before he could fully make up his mind to that, the face or figure had already disappeared, gliding furtively down some narrow unlighted by-street, without turning to look to right or left, as if dreading fuller recognition. Armand felt a total stranger in his own native city.

The terrible hours of the execution on the Place de la Révolution were fortunately over, the tumbrils no longer rattled along the uneven pavements, nor did the death-cry of the unfortunate victims resound through the deserted streets. Armand was, on this first day of his arrival, spared the sight of this degradation of the once lovely city; but her desolation, her general appearance of shamefaced indigence and of cruel aloofness struck a chill in the young man's heart.

It was no wonder, therefore, when anon he was wending his way slowly back to his lodging he was accosted by a pleasant, cheerful voice, that he responded to it with alacrity. The voice, of a smooth, oily *timbre*, as if the owner kept it well greased for purposes of amiable speech, was like an echo of the past, when jolly, irresponsible Baron de Batz, erstwhile officer of the Guard in the service of the late King, and since then known to be the most inveterate conspirator for the restoration of the monarchy, used to amuse Marguerite by his vapid, senseless plans for the overthrow of the newly-risen power of the people.

Armand was quite glad to meet him, and when de Batz suggested that a good talk over old times would be vastly agreeable, the younger man gladly acceded. The two men, though certainly not mistrustful of one another, did not seem to care to reveal to each other the place where they lodged. De Batz at once proposed the *avant-scène* box of one of the theatres as being the safest place where old friends could talk without fear of spying eyes or ears.

"There is no place so safe or so private nowadays, believe me, my young friend," he said. "I have tried every sort of nook and cranny in this accursed town, now riddled with spies, and I have come to the conclusion that a small *avant-scène* box is the most perfect den of privacy there is in the entire city. The voices of the actors on the stage and the hum among the audience in the house will effectually drown all individual conversation to every ear save the one for whom it is intended."

It is not difficult to persuade a young man who feels lonely and somewhat forlorn in a large city to while away an evening in the companionship of a cheerful talker, and de Batz was essentially good company. His vapourings had always been amusing, but Armand now gave him credit for more seriousness of purpose; and though the chief had warned him against picking up acquaintances in Paris, the young man felt that that restriction would certainly not apply to a man like de Batz whose hot partisanship of the Royalist cause and hare-brained schemes for its restoration must make him at one with the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel.

Armand accepted the other's cordial invitation.

He, too, felt that he would indeed be safer from observation in a crowded theatre than in the streets. Among a closely packed throng bent on amusement the sombrely-clad figure of a young man, with the appearance of a student or of a journalist, would easily pass unperceived.

But somehow, after the first ten minutes spent in de Batz' company within the gloomy shelter of the small *avant-scène* box, Armand already repented of the impulse which had prompted him to come to the theatre to-night, and to renew acquaintanceship with the ex-officer of the late King's Guard. Though he knew de Batz to be an ardent Royalist, and even an active adherent of the monarchy, he was soon conscious of a vague sense of mistrust of this pompous, self-complacent individual, whose every utterance breathed selfish aims rather than devotion to a forlorn cause.

Therefore, when the curtain rose at last on the first act of Molière's witty comedy, St. Just turned deliberately towards the stage and tried to interest himself in the wordy quarrel between Philinte and Alceste.

But this attitude on the part of the younger man did not seem to suit his newly-found friend. It was clear that de Batz did not consider the topic of conversation by any means exhausted, and that it had been more with a view to a discussion like the present interrupted one that he had invited St. Just to come to the theatre with him to-night, rather than for the purpose of witnessing Mlle. Lange's *début* in the part of Célimène.

The presence of St. Just in Paris had as a matter of fact astonished de Batz not a little, and had set his intriguing brain busy on conjectures. It was in order to turn these conjectures into certainties that he had desired private talk with the young man.

He waited silently now for a moment or two, his keen, small eyes resting with evident anxiety on Armand's averted head, his fingers still beating the impatient tattoo upon the velvet-covered cushion of the box. Then at the first movement of St. Just towards him he was ready in an instant to reopen the subject under discussion.

With a quick nod of his head he called his young friend's attention back to the men in the auditorium.

"Your good cousin Antoine St. Just is hand and glove with Robespierre now," he said. "When you left Paris more than a year ago you could afford to despise him as an empty-headed windbag; now, if you desire to remain in France, you will have to fear him as a power and a menace."

"Yes, I knew that he had taken to herding with the wolves," rejoined Armand lightly. "At one time he was in love with my sister. I thank God that she never cared for him."

"They say that he herds with the wolves because of this disappointment," said de Batz. "The whole pack is made up of men who have been disappointed, and who have nothing to lose. When all these wolves will have devoured one another, then and then only can we hope for the restoration of the monarchy in France. And they will not turn on one another whilst prey for their greed lies ready to their jaws. Your friend the Scarlet Pimpernel should feed this bloody revolution of ours rather than starve it, if indeed he hates it as he seems to do."

His restless eyes peered with eager interrogation into those of the younger man. He paused as if waiting for a reply; then, as St. Just remained silent, he reiterated slowly, almost in the tones of a challenge:

"If indeed he hates this bloodthirsty revolution of ours as he seems to do."

The reiteration implied a doubt. In a moment St. Just's loyalty was up in arms.

"The Scarlet Pimpernel," he said, "cares naught for your political aims. The work of mercy that he does, he does for justice and for humanity."

"And for sport," said de Batz with a sneer, "so I've been told."

"He is English," assented St. Just, "and as such will never own to sentiment. Whatever be the motive, look at the result!"

"Yes! a few lives stolen from the guillotine."

"Women and children—innocent victims who would have perished but for his devotion."

"The more innocent they were, the more helpless, the more pitiable, the louder would their blood have cried for reprisals against the wild beasts who sent them to their death."

St. Just made no reply. It was obviously useless to attempt to argue with this man, whose political aims were as far apart from those of the Scarlet Pimpernel as was the North Pole from the South.

"If any of you have influence over that hot-headed leader of yours," continued de Batz, unabashed by the silence of his friend, "I wish to God you would exert it now."

"In what way?" queried St. Just, smiling in spite of himself at the thought of his or anyone else's control over Blakeney and his plans.

It was de Batz' turn to be silent. He paused for a moment or two, then he asked abruptly:

"Your Scarlet Pimpernel is in Paris now, is he not?"

"I cannot tell you," replied Armand.

"Bah! there is no necessity to fence with me, my friend. The moment I set eyes on you this afternoon I knew that you had not come to Paris alone."

"You are mistaken, my good de Batz," rejoined the young man earnestly; "I came to Paris alone."

"Clever parrying, on my word—but wholly wasted on my unbelieving ears. Did I not note at once that you did not seem overpleased to-day when I accosted you?"

"Again, you are mistaken. I was very pleased to meet you, for I had felt singularly lonely all day, and was glad to shake a friend by the hand. What you took for displeasure was only surprise."

"Surprise? Ah, yes! I don't wonder that you were surprised to see me walking unmolested and openly in the streets of Paris—whereas you had heard of me as a dangerous conspirator, eh?—and as a man who has the entire police of his country at his heels—on whose head there is a price—what?"

"I knew that you had made several noble efforts to rescue the unfortunate King and Queen from the hands of these brutes."

"All of which efforts were unsuccessful," assented de Batz imperturbably, "every one of them having been either betrayed by some d——d confederate or ferreted out by some astute spy eager for gain. Yes, my friend, I made several efforts to rescue King Louis and Queen Marie Antoinette from the scaffold, and every time I was foiled, and yet here I am, you see, unscathed and free. I walk about the streets boldly, and talk to my friends as I meet them."

"You are lucky," said St. Just, not without a tinge of sarcasm.

"I have been prudent," retorted de Batz. "I have taken the trouble to make friends there where I thought I needed them most—the mammon of unrighteousness, you know—what?"

And he laughed a broad, thick laugh of perfect self-satisfaction.

"Yes, I know," rejoined St. Just, with the tone of sarcasm still more apparent in his voice now. "You have Austrian money at your disposal."

"Any amount," said the other complacently, "and a great deal of it sticks to the grimy fingers of these patriotic makers of revolutions. Thus do I ensure my own safety. I buy it with the Emperor's money, and thus I am able to work for the restoration of the monarchy in France."

Again St. Just was silent. What could he say? Instinctively now, as the fleshy personality of the Gascon Royalist seemed to spread itself out and to fill the tiny box with his ambitious schemes and his far-reaching plans, Armand's thoughts flew back to that other plotter, the man with the pure and simple aims, the man whose slender fingers had never handled alien gold, but were ever there ready stretched out to the helpless and the weak, whilst his thoughts were only of the help that he might give them, but never of his own safety.

De Batz, however, seemed blandly unconscious of any such disparaging thoughts in the mind of his young friend, for he continued quite amiably, even though a note of anxiety seemed to make itself felt now in his smooth voice.

"We advance slowly, but step by step, my good St. Just," he said. "I have not been able to save the monarchy in the person of the King or the Queen, but I may yet do it in the person of the Dauphin."

"The Dauphin," murmured St. Just involuntarily.

That involuntary murmur, scarcely audible so soft was it, seemed in some way to satisfy de Batz, for the keenness of his gaze relaxed, and his fat fingers ceased their nervous, intermittent tattoo on the ledge of the box.

"Yes! the Dauphin," he said, nodding his head as if in answer to his own thoughts, "or rather, let me say, the reigning King of France—Louis XVII., by the grace of God—the most precious life at present upon the whole of this earth."

"You are right there, friend de Batz," assented Armand fervently, "the most precious life, as you say, and one that must be saved at all costs."

"Yes," said de Batz calmly, "but not by your friend the Scarlet Pimpernel."

"Why not?"

Scarce were those two little words out of St. Just's mouth than he repented of them. He bit his lip, and with a dark frown upon his face he turned almost defiantly towards his friend.

But de Batz smiled with easy *bonhomie*.

"Ah, friend Armand," he said, "you were not cut out for diplomacy, nor yet for intrigue. So then," he added more seriously, "that gallant hero, the Scarlet Pimpernel, has hopes of rescuing our young King from the clutches of Simon the cobbler and of the herd of hyenas on the watch for his attenuated little corpse, eh?"

"I did not say that," retorted St. Just sullenly.

"No. But I say it. Nay! nay! do not blame yourself, my over-loyal young friend. Could I, or anyone else, doubt for a moment that sooner or later your romantic hero would turn his attention to the most pathetic sight in the whole of Europe—the child-martyr in the Temple Prison? The wonder were to me if the Scarlet Pimpernel ignored our little King altogether for the sake of his subjects. No, no; do not think for a moment that you have betrayed your friend's secret to me. When I met you so luckily to-day I guessed at once that you were here under the banner of the enigmatical little red flower, and, thus guessing, I even went a step further in my conjecture. The Scarlet Pimpernel is in Paris now in the hope of rescuing Louis XVII. from the Temple Prison."

"If that is so, you must not only rejoice but should be able to help."

"And yet, my friend, I do neither the one now nor mean to do the other in the future," said de Batz placidly. "I happen to be a Frenchman, you see."

"What has that to do with such a question?"

"Everything; though you, Armand, despite that you are a Frenchman too, do not look through my spectacles. Louis XVII. is King of France, my good St. Just; he must owe his freedom and his life to us Frenchmen, and to no one else."

"That is sheer madness, man," retorted Armand. "Would you have the child perish for the sake of your own selfish ideas?"

"You may call them selfish if you will; all patriotism is in a measure selfish. What does the rest of the world care if we are a republic or a monarchy, an oligarchy or hopeless anarchy? We work for ourselves and to please ourselves, and I for one will not brook foreign interference."

"Yet you work with foreign money!"

"That is another matter. I cannot get money in France, so I get it where I can; but I can arrange for the escape of Louis XVII. from the Temple Prison, and to us Royalists of France should belong the honour and glory of having saved our King."

For the third time now St. Just allowed the conversation to drop; he was gazing wide-eyed, almost appalled at this impudent display of wellnigh ferocious selfishness and vanity. De Batz, smiling and complacent, was leaning back in his chair, looking at his young friend with perfect contentment expressed in every line of his pock-marked face and in the very attitude of his well-fed body. It was easy enough now to understand the remarkable immunity which this man was enjoying, despite the many foolhardy plots which he hatched, and which had up to now invariably come to naught.

A regular braggart and empty windbag, he had taken but one good care, and that was of his own skin. Unlike other less fortunate Royalists of France, he neither fought in the country nor braved dangers in town. He played a safer game—crossed the frontier and constituted himself agent of Austria; he succeeded in gaining the Emperor's money for the good of the Royalist cause, and for his own most especial benefit.

Even a less astute man of the world than was Armand St. Just would easily have guessed that de Batz' desire to be the only instrument in the rescue of the poor little Dauphin from the Temple was not actuated by patriotism, but solely by greed. Obviously there was a rich reward waiting for him in Vienna the day that he brought Louis XVII. safely into Austrian territory; that reward he would miss if a meddlesome Englishman interfered in this affair. Whether in this wrangle he risked the life of the child-King or not mattered to him not at all. It was de Batz who was to get the reward and whose welfare and prosperity mattered more than the most precious life in Europe.

3

THE DEMON CHANCE

St. Just would have given much to be back in his lonely squalid lodgings now. Too late did he realize how wise had been the dictum which had warned him against making or renewing friendships in France.

Men had changed with the times. How terribly they had changed! Personal safety had become a fetish with most—a goal so difficult to attain that it had to be fought for and striven for, even at the expense of humanity and of self-respect.

Selfishness—the mere, cold-blooded insistence for self-advancement—ruled supreme. De Batz, surfeited with foreign money, used it firstly to ensure his own immunity, scattering it to right and left to still the ambition of the Public Prosecutor or to satisfy the greed of innumerable spies.

What was left over he used for the purpose of pitting the bloodthirsty demagogues one against the other, making of the National Assembly a gigantic bear-den, wherein wild beasts could rend one another limb from limb.

In the meanwhile, what cared he—he said it himself—whether hundreds of innocent martyrs perished miserably and uselessly? They were the necessary food whereby the Revolution was to be satiated and de Batz' schemes enabled to mature. The most precious life in Europe even was only to be saved if its price went to swell the pockets of de Batz, or to further his future ambitions.

Times had indeed changed an entire nation. St. Just felt as sickened with this self-seeking Royalist as he did with the savage brutes who struck to right or left for their own delectation. He was meditating immediate flight back to his lodgings, with a hope of finding there a word for him from the chief—a word to remind him that men did live nowadays who had other aims besides their own advancement—other ideals besides the deification of self.

The curtain had descended on the first act, and traditionally, as the works of M. de Molière demanded it, the three knocks were heard again without any interval. St. Just rose ready with a pretext for parting with his friend. The curtain was being slowly drawn up on the second act, and disclosed Alceste in wrathful conversation with Célimène.

Alceste's opening speech is short. Whilst the actor spoke it Armand had his back to the stage; with hand outstretched, he was murmuring what he hoped would prove a polite excuse for thus leaving his amiable host while the entertainment had only just begun.

De Batz—vexed and impatient—had not by any means finished with his friend yet. He thought that his specious arguments—delivered with boundless conviction—had made some impression on the mind of the young man. That impression, however, he desired to deepen, and whilst Armand was worrying his brain to find a plausible excuse for going away, de Batz was racking his to find one for keeping him here.

Then it was that the wayward demon Chance intervened. Had St. Just risen but two minutes earlier, had his active mind suggested the desired excuse more readily, who knows what unspeakable sorrow, what heartrending misery, what terrible shame might have been spared both him and those for whom he cared? Those two minutes—did he but know it—decided the whole course of his future life. The excuse hovered on his lips, de Batz reluctantly was preparing to bid him good-bye, when Célimène, speaking common-place words enough in answer to her quarrelsome lover, caused him to drop the hand which he was holding out to his friend, and to turn back towards the stage.

It was an exquisite voice that had spoken—a voice mellow and tender, with deep tones in it that betrayed latent power. The voice had caused Armand to look, the lips that spoke forged the first tiny link of that chain which riveted him for ever after to the speaker.

It is difficult to say if such a thing really exists as love at first sight. Poets and romancists will have us believe that it does; idealists swear by it as being the only true love worthy of the name.

I do not know if I am prepared to admit their theory with regard to Armand St. Just. Mlle. Lange's exquisite voice certainly had charmed him to the extent of making him forget his mistrust of de Batz and his desire to get away. Mechanically almost he sat down again, and leaning both elbows on the edge of the box, he rested his chin in his hand, and listened. The words which the late M. de Molière puts into the mouth of Célimène are trite and flippant enough, yet every time that Mlle. Lange's lips moved Armand watched her, entranced.

There, no doubt, the matter would have ended; a young man fascinated by a pretty woman on the stage—'tis a small matter, and one from which there doth not often spring a weary trail of tragic circumstances. Armand, who had a passion for music, would have worshipped at the shrine of Mlle. Lange's perfect voice until the curtain came down on the last act, had not his friend de Batz seen the keen enchantment which the actress had produced on the young enthusiast.

Now de Batz was a man who never allowed an opportunity to slip by, if that opportunity led towards the furtherance of his own desires. He did not want to lose sight of Armand just yet, and here the good demon Chance had given him an opportunity for obtaining what he wanted.

He waited quietly until the fall of the curtain at the end of Act II.; then, as Armand, with a sigh of delight, leaned back in his chair, and closing his eyes appeared to be living the last half-hour all over again, de Batz remarked with well-assumed indifference:

"Mlle. Lange is a promising young actress. Do you not think so, my friend?"

"She has a perfect voice—it was exquisite melody to the ear," replied Armand. "I was conscious of little else."

"She is a beautiful woman, nevertheless," continued de Batz with a smile. "During the next act, my good St. Just, I would suggest that you opened your eyes as well as your ears."

Armand did as he was bidden. The whole appearance of Mlle. Lange seemed in harmony with her voice. She was not very tall, but eminently graceful, with a small, oval face and slender almost childlike figure, which appeared still more so above the wide hoops and draped panniers of the fashions of Molière's time.

Whether she was beautiful or not the young man hardly knew. Measured by certain standards, she certainly was not so, for her mouth was not small, and her nose anything but classical in outline. But the eyes were brown, and they had that half-veiled look in them—shaded with long lashes—that seem to make a perpetual tender appeal to the masculine heart; the lips, too, were full and moist, and the teeth dazzlingly white. Yes!—on the whole we might easily say that she was exquisite, even though we did not admit that she was beautiful.

Painter David has made a sketch of her; we have all seen it at the Musée Carnavalet, and all wondered why that charming, if irregular, little face made such an impression of sadness.

There are five acts in "Le Misanthrope," during which Célimène is almost constantly on the stage. At the end of the fourth act de Batz said casually to his friend:

"I have the honour of personal acquaintanceship with Mlle. Lange. An you care for an introduction to her, we can go round to the green-room after the play."

Did prudence then whisper, "Desist"? Did loyalty to the leader murmur, "Obey"? It were indeed difficult to say. Armand St. Just was not five-and-twenty, and Mlle. Lange's melodious voice spoke louder than the whisperings of prudence or even than the call of duty.

He thanked de Batz warmly, and during the last half-hour, while the misanthropical lover spurned repentant Célimène, he was conscious of a curious sensation of impatience, a tingling of his nerves, a wild, mad longing to hear those full, moist lips pronounce his name, and to see those large brown eyes throw their half-veiled look into his own.

4

MADEMOISELLE LANGE

THE green-room was crowded when de Batz and St. Just arrived there after the performance. The older man cast a hasty glance through the open door. The crowd did not suit his purpose, and he dragged his companion hurriedly away from the contemplation of Mlle. Lange, sitting in a far corner of the room, surrounded by an admiring throng, and by innumerable floral tributes offered to her beauty and to her success.

De Batz without a word led the way back towards the stage. Here, by the dim light of tallow candles fixed in sconces against the surrounding walls, the scene-shifters were busy moving drop-scenes, back cloths and wings, and paid no heed to the two men who strolled slowly up and down silently, each wrapped in his own thoughts.

Armand walked with his hands buried in his breeches pockets, his head bent forward on his chest; but every now and again he threw quick, apprehensive glances round him whenever a firm step echoed along the empty stage or a voice rang clearly through the now deserted theatre.

"Are we wise to wait here?" he asked, speaking to himself rather than to his companion.

He was not anxious about his own safety; but the words of de Batz had impressed themselves upon his mind: "Héron and his spies we have always with us."

From the green-room a separate *foyer* and exit led directly out into the street. Gradually the sound of many voices, the loud laughter and occasional snatches of song which for the past half-hour had proceeded from that part of the house, became more subdued and more rare. One by one the friends of the artistes were leaving the theatre, after having paid the usual banal compliments to those whom they favoured, or presented the accustomed offering of flowers to the brightest star of the night.

The actors were the first to retire, then the older actresses, the ones who could no longer command a court of admirers round them. They all filed out of the green-room and crossed the stage to where at the back, narrow, rickety wooden stairs led to their so-called dressing-rooms—tiny, dark cubicles, ill-lighted, unventilated, where some half-dozen of the lesser stars tumbled over one another while removing wigs and grease-paint.

Armand and de Batz watched this exodus, both with equal impatience. Mlle. Lange was the last to leave the green-room. For some time, since the crowd had become thinner around her, Armand had contrived to catch glimpses of her slight, elegant figure. A short passage led from the stage to the green-room door, which was wide open, and at the corner of this passage the young man had paused from time to time in his walk, gazing with earnest admiration at the dainty outline of the young girl's head, with its wig of powdered curls that seemed scarcely whiter than the creamy brilliance of her skin.

De Batz did not watch Mlle. Lange beyond casting impatient looks in the direction of the crowd that prevented her leaving the green-room. He did watch Armand, however—noted his eager look, his brisk and alert movements, the obvious glances of admiration which he cast in the direction of the young actress, and this seemed to afford him a considerable amount of contentment.

The best part of an hour had gone by since the fall of the curtain before Mlle. Lange finally dismissed her many admirers, and de Batz had the satisfaction of seeing her running down the passage, turning back occasionally in order to bid gay "good nights" to the loiterers who were loath to part from her. She was a child in all her movements, quite unconscious of self or of her own charms, but frankly delighted with her success. She was still dressed in the ridiculous hoops and panniers pertaining to her part, and the powdered peruke hid the charm of her own hair; the costume gave a certain stilted air to her unaffected personality, which, by this very sense of contrast, was essentially fascinating.

In her arms she held a huge sheaf of sweet-scented narcissi, the spoils of some favoured spot far away in the South. Armand thought that never in his life had he seen anything so winsome or so charming.

Having at last said the positively final adieu, Mlle. Lange with a happy little sigh turned to run down the passage.

She came face to face with Armand, and gave a sudden little gasp of terror. It was not good these days to come on any loiterer unawares.

But already de Batz had quickly joined his friend, and his smooth, pleasant voice, and podgy, beringed hand extended towards Mlle. Lange, were sufficient to reassure her.

"You were so surrounded in the green-room, mademoiselle," he said courteously, "I did not venture to press in among the crowd of your admirers. Yet I had the great wish to present my respectful congratulations in person."

"Ah! c'est ce cher de Batz!" exclaimed mademoiselle gaily, in that exquisitely rippling voice of hers. "And where in the world do you spring from, my friend?"

"Hush-sh-sh!" he whispered, holding her small bemittened hand in his, and putting one finger to his lips with an urgent entreaty for discretion; "not my name, I beg of you, fair one."

"Bah!" she retorted lightly, even though her full lips trembled now as she spoke and belied her very words. "You need have no fear whilst you are in this part of the house. It is an understood thing that the Committee of General Security does not send its spies behind the curtain of a theatre. Why, if all of us actors and actresses were sent to the guillotine there would be no play on the morrow. Artistes are not replaceable in a few hours; those that are in existence must perforce be spared, or the citizens who govern us now would not know where to spend their evenings."

But though she spoke so airily and with her accustomed gaiety, it was easily perceived that even on this childish mind the dangers which beset every one these days had already imprinted their mark of suspicion and of caution.

"Come into my dressing-room," she said. "I must not tarry here any longer, for they will be putting out the lights. But I have a room to myself, and we can talk there quite agreeably."

She led the way across the stage towards the wooden stairs. Armand, who during this brief colloquy between his friend and the young girl had kept discreetly in the background, felt undecided what to do. But at a peremptory sign from de Batz, he, too, turned in the wake of the gay little lady, who ran swiftly up the rickety steps, humming snatches of popular songs the while, and not turning to see if indeed the two men were following her.

She had the sheaf of narcissi still in her arms, and the door of her tiny dressing-room being open, she ran straight in and threw the flowers down in a confused, sweet-scented mass upon the small table that stood at one end of the room, littered with pots and bottles, letters, mirrors, powder-puffs, silk stockings, and cambric handkerchiefs.

Then she turned and faced the two men, a merry look of unalterable gaiety dancing in her eyes.

"Shut the door, mon ami," she said to de Batz, "and after that sit down where you can, so long as it is not on my most precious pot of unguent or a box of costliest powder."

While de Batz did as he was told, she turned to Armand and said with a pretty tone of interrogation in her melodious voice:

"Monsieur?"

"St. Just, at your service, mademoiselle," said Armand, bowing very low in the most approved style obtaining at the English Court.

"St. Just?" she repeated, a look of puzzlement in her brown eyes. "Surely——"

"A kinsman of citizen St. Just, whom no doubt you know, mademoiselle," he explained.

"My friend Armand St. Just," interposed de Batz, "is practically a new-comer in Paris. He lives in England habitually."

"In England?" she exclaimed. "Oh! do tell me all about England. I would love to go there. Perhaps I may have to go some day. Oh! do sit down, de Batz," she continued, talking rather volubly, even as a delicate blush heightened the colour in her cheeks under the look of obvious admiration from Armand St. Just's expressive eyes.

She swept a handful of delicate cambric and silk from off a chair, making room for de Batz' portly figure. Then she sat upon the sofa, and with an inviting gesture and a call from the eyes she bade Armand sit down next to her.

She leaned back against the cushions, and the table being close by, she stretched out a hand and once more took up the bunch of narcissi, and while she talked to Armand she held the snow-white blooms quite close to her face—so close, in fact, that he could not see her mouth and chin, only her dark eyes shone across at him over the heads of the blossoms.

"Tell me all about England," she reiterated, settling herself down among the cushions like a spoilt child who is about to listen to an oft-told favourite story.

Armand was vexed that de Batz was sitting there. He felt he could have told this dainty little lady quite a good deal about England if only his pompous, fat friend would have had the good sense to go away.

As it was, he felt unusually timid and *gauche*, not quite knowing what to say, a fact which seemed to amuse Mlle. Lange not a little.

"I am very fond of England," he said lamely; "my sister is married to an Englishman, and I myself have taken up my permanent residence there."

"Among the society of émigrés?" she queried.

Then, as Armand made no reply, de Batz interposed quickly:

"Oh! you need not fear to admit it, my good Armand! Mademoiselle Lange has many friends among the émigrés—have you not, mademoiselle?"

"Yes, of course," she replied lightly; "I have friends everywhere. Their political views have nothing to do with me. Artistes, I think, should have naught to do with politics. You see, citizen St. Just, I never inquired of you what were your views. Your name and kinship would proclaim you a partisan of citizen Robespierre yet I find you in the company of M. de Batz; and you tell me that you live in England."

"He is no partisan of citizen Robespierre," again interposed de Batz; "in fact, mademoiselle, I may safely tell you, I think, that my friend has but one ideal on this earth, whom he has set up in a shrine, and whom he worships with all the ardour of a Christian for his God."

"How romantic!" she said, and she looked straight at Armand. "Tell me, monsieur, is your ideal a woman or a man?"

His look answered her, even before he boldly spoke the two words:

"A woman."

She took a deep draught of sweet, intoxicating scent from the narcissi, and his gaze once more brought blushes to her cheeks. De Batz' good-humoured laugh helped her to hide this unwonted access of confusion.

"That was well turned, friend Armand," he said lightly; "but I assure you, mademoiselle, that before I brought him here to-night his ideal was a man."

"A man!" she exclaimed, with a contemptuous little pout. "Who was it?"

"I know no other name for him but that of a small, insignificant flower—the Scarlet Pimpernel," replied de Batz.

"The Scarlet Pimpernel!" she ejaculated, dropping the flowers suddenly, and gazing on Armand with wide, wondering eyes. "And do you know him, monsieur?"

He was frowning despite himself, despite the delight which he felt at sitting so close to this charming little lady, and feeling that in a measure his presence and his personality interested her. But he felt irritated with de Batz, and angered at what he considered the latter's indiscretion. To him the very name of his leader was almost a sacred one; he was one of those enthusiastic devotees who only care to name the idol of their dreams with bated breath, and only in the ears of those who would understand and sympathize.

Again he felt that if only he could have been alone with mademoiselle he could have told her all about the Scarlet Pimpernel, knowing that in her he would find a ready listener, a helping and a loving heart; but as it was he merely replied tamely enough:

"Yes, mademoiselle, I do know him."

"You have seen him?" she queried eagerly; "spoken to him?"

"Yes."

"Oh! do tell me all about him. You know quite a number of us in France have the greatest possible admiration for your national hero. We know, of course, that he is an enemy of our Government—but, oh! we feel that he is not an enemy of France because of that. We are a nation of heroes, too, monsieur," she added with a pretty, proud toss of the head; "we can appreciate bravery and resource, and we love the mystery that surrounds the personality of your Scarlet Pimpernel. But since you know him, monsieur, tell me what is he like?"

Armand was smiling again. He was yielding himself up wholly to the charm which emanated from this young girl's entire being, from her gaiety and her unaffectedness, her enthusiasm, and that obvious artistic temperament which caused her to feel every sensation with superlative keenness and thoroughness.

"What is he like?" she insisted.

"That, mademoiselle," he replied, "I am not at liberty to tell you."

"Not at liberty to tell me!" she exclaimed; "but monsieur, if I command you——"

"At risk of falling for ever under the ban of your displeasure, mademoiselle, I would still remain silent on that subject."

She gazed down on him with obvious astonishment. It was quite an unusual thing for this spoilt darling of an admiring public to be thus openly thwarted in her whims.

"How tiresome and pedantic!" she said, with a shrug of her pretty shoulders and a *moue* of discontent. And, oh! how ungallant! You have learnt ugly, English ways, monsieur; for there, I am told, men hold their womenkind in very scant esteem. There!" she added, turning with a mock air of hopelessness towards de Batz, "am I not a most unlucky woman? For the past two years I have used my best endeavours to catch sight of that interesting Scarlet Pimpernel; here do I meet monsieur, who actually knows him (so he says), and he is so ungallant that he even refuses to satisfy the first cravings of my just curiosity.'

"Citizen St. Just will tell you nothing now, mademoiselle," rejoined de Batz with his good-humoured laugh; "it is my presence, I assure you, which is setting a seal upon his lips. He is, believe me, aching to confide in you, to share in your enthusiasm, and to see your beautiful eyes glowing in response to his ardour when he describes to you the exploits of that prince of heroes. En tête-à-tête, one day, you will, I know, worm every secret out of my discreet friend Armand."

Mademoiselle made no comment on this—that is to say, no audible comment—but she buried the whole of her face for a few seconds among the flowers, and Armand from amongst those flowers caught sight of a pair of very bright brown eyes which shone on him with a puzzled look.

She said nothing more about the Scarlet Pimpernel or about England just then, but after awhile she began talking of more indifferent subjects: the state of the weather, the price of food, the discomforts of her own house, now that the servants had been put on perfect equality with their masters.

Armand soon gathered that the burning questions of the day, the horrors of massacres, the raging turmoil of politics, had not affected her very deeply as yet. She had not troubled her pretty head very much about the social and humanitarian aspect of the present seething revolution. She did not really wish to think about it at all. An artist to her finger-tips, she was spending her young life in earnest work, striving to attain perfection in her art, absorbed in study during the day, and in the expression of what she had learnt in the evenings.

The terrors of the guillotine affected her a little, but somewhat vaguely still. She had not realized that any dangers could assail her whilst she worked for the artistic delectation of the public.

It was not that she did not understand what went on around her, but that her artistic temperament and her environment had kept her aloof from it all. The horrors of the Place de la Révolution made her shudder, but only in the same way as the tragedies of M. Racine or of Sophocles which she had studied caused her to shudder, and she had exactly the same sympathy for poor Queen Marie Antoinette as she had for Mary Stuart, and shed as many tears for King Louis as she did for Polyeucte.

Once de Batz mentioned the Dauphin, but mademoiselle put up her hand quickly, and said in a trembling voice, whilst the tears gathered in her eyes:

"Do not speak of the child to me, de Batz. What can I, a lonely, hard-working woman, do to help him? I try not to think of him, for if I did, knowing my own helplessness, I feel that I could hate my countrymen, and speak my bitter hatred of them across the footlights; which would be more than foolish," she added naively, "for it would not help the child, and I should be sent to the guillotine. But oh! sometimes I feel that I would gladly die if only that poor little child-martyr were restored to those who love him and given back once more to joy and happiness. But they would not take my life for his, I am afraid," she concluded, smiling through her tears. "My life is of no value in comparison with his."

Soon after this she dismissed her two visitors. De Batz, well content with the result of this evening's entertainment, wore an urbane, bland smile on his rubicund face. Armand, somewhat serious and not a little in love, made the hand-kiss with which he took his leave last as long as he could.

"You will come and see me again, citizen St. Just?" she asked after that preliminary leave-taking.

"At your service, mademoiselle," he replied with alacrity.

"How long do you stay in Paris?"

"I may be called away at any time."

"Well, then, come to-morrow. I shall be free towards four o'clock. Square du Roule. You cannot miss the house. Anyone there will tell you where lives citizeness Lange."

"At your service, mademoiselle," he replied.

The words sounded empty and meaningless, but his eyes, as they took final leave of her, spoke the gratitude and the joy which he felt.

5

THE TEMPLE PRISON

It was close on midnight when the two friends finally parted company outside the doors of the theatre. The night air struck with biting keenness against them when they emerged from the stuffy overheated building, and both wrapped their caped cloaks tightly round their shoulders.

Armand—more than ever now—was anxious to rid himself of de Batz. The Gascon's platitudes irritated him beyond the bounds of forbearance, and he wanted to be alone, so that he might think over the events of this night, the chief event being a little lady with an enchanting voice and the most fascinating brown eyes he had ever seen.

Self-reproach, too, was fighting a fairly even fight with the excitement that had been called up by that same pair of brown eyes. Armand for the past four or five hours had acted in direct opposition to the earnest advice given to him by his chief; he had renewed one friendship which had been far better left in oblivion, and he had made an acquaintance which already was leading him along a path that he felt sure his comrade would disapprove. But the path was so profusely strewn with scented narcissi that Armand's sensitive conscience was quickly lulled to rest by the intoxicating fragrance.

Looking neither to right nor left, he made his way very quickly up the Rue Richelieu towards the Montmartre quarter, where he lodged. De Batz stood and watched him for as long as the dim lights of the street lamps illumined his slim, soberly-clad figure; then he turned on his heel and walked off in the opposite direction.

His florid, pock-marked face wore an air of contentment not altogether unmixed with a kind of spiteful triumph.

"So, my pretty Scarlet Pimpernel," he muttered between his closed lips, "you wish to meddle in my affairs, to have for yourself and your friends the credit and glory of snatching the golden prize from the clutches of these murderous brutes. Well, we shall see! We shall see which is the wiliest—the French ferret or the English fox."

He walked deliberately away from the busy part of the town, turning his back on the river, stepping out briskly straight before him, and swinging his gold-headed cane as he walked.

The streets which he had to traverse were silent and deserted, save occasionally where a drinking- or an eating-house had its swing-doors still invitingly open. From these places, as de Batz strode rapidly by, came sounds of loud voices, rendered raucous by outdoor oratory; volleys of oaths hurled irreverently in the midst of impassioned speeches; interruptions from rowdy audiences that vied with the speaker in invectives and blasphemies; wordy warfares that ended in noisy vituperations; accusations hurled through the air heavy with tobacco smoke and the fumes of cheap wines and of raw spirits.

De Batz took no heed of these as he passed, anxious only that the crowd of eating-house politicians did not, as often was its wont, turn out *pêle-mêle* into the street and settle its quarrel by the weight of fists. He did not wish to be embroiled in a street fight, which invariably ended in denunciations and arrests, and was glad when presently he had left the purlieus of the Palais Royal behind him, and could strike on his left toward the lonely Faubourg du Temple.

From the dim distance far away came at intervals the mournful sound of a roll of muffled drums, half veiled by the intervening hubbub of the busy night life of the great city. It proceeded from the Place de la Révolution, where a company of the National Guard were on night watch round the guillotine. The dull, intermittent notes of the drum came as a reminder to the free people of France that the watch-dog of a vengeful revolution was alert night and day, never sleeping, ever waking, "beating up game for the guillotine," as the new decree framed to-day by the Government of the people had ordered that it should do.

From time to time now the silence of this lonely street was broken by a sudden cry of terror, followed by the clash of arms, the inevitable volley of oaths, the call for help, the final moan of anguish. They were the ever-recurring brief tragedies which told of denunciations, of domiciliary search, of sudden arrests, of an agonizing desire for life and for freedom—for life under these same horrible conditions of brutality and of servitude, for freedom to breathe, if only a day or two longer, this air, polluted by filth and by blood.

De Batz hardened to these scenes, paid no heed to them. He had heard it so often, that cry in the night, followed by death-like silence; it came from comfortable bourgeois houses, from squalid lodgings, or lonely culs-de-sac, wherever some hunted quarry was run to earth by the newly-organized spies of the Committee of General Security.

Five and thirty livres for every head that falls trunkless into the basket at the foot of the guillotine! Five and thirty pieces of silver, now as then, the price of innocent blood. Every cry in the night, every call for help, meant game for the guillotine, and five and thirty livres in the hands of a Judas.

And de Batz walked on unmoved by what he saw and heard, swinging his cane and looking satisfied. Now he struck into the Place de la Victoire, and looked on one of the open-air camps that had recently been established, where men, women and children were working to provide arms and accoutrements for the Republican army that was fighting the whole of Europe.

The people of France were up in arms against tyranny; and on the open places of their mighty city they were encamped day and night forging those arms which were destined to make them free, and in the meantime were bending under a yoke of tyranny more complete, more grinding and absolute than any that the most despotic kings had ever dared to inflict.

Here by the light of resin torches, at this late hour of the night, raw lads were being drilled into soldiers, half-naked under the cutting blast of the north wind, their knees shaking under them, their arms and legs blue with cold, their stomachs empty, and their teeth chattering with fear; women were sewing shirts for the great improvised army, with eyes straining to see the stitches by the flickering light of the torches, their throats parched with the continual inhaling of smoke-laden air; even children, with weak, clumsy little fingers, were picking rags to be woven into cloth again—all, all these slaves were working far into the night, tired, hungry, and cold, but working unceasingly, as the country had demanded it: "the people of France in arms against tyranny!" The people of France had set to work to make arms, to clothe the soldiers, the defenders of the people's liberty.

And from this crowd of people—men, women, and children—there came scarcely a sound, save raucous whispers, a moan or a sigh quickly suppressed. A grim silence reigned in this thickly-peopled camp; only the crackling of the torches broke that silence now and then, or the flapping of canvas in the wintry gale. They worked on sullen, desperate, and starving, with no hope of payment save the miserable rations wrung from poor tradespeople or miserable farmers, as wretched, as oppressed as themselves; no hope of payment, only fear of punishment, for that was ever present.

The people of France in arms against tyranny were not allowed to forget that grim taskmaster with the two great hands stretched upwards, holding the knife which descended mercilessly, indiscriminately on necks that did not bend willingly to the task.

A grim look of gratified desire had spread over de Batz' face as he skirted the open-air camp. Let them toil, let them groan, let them starve! The more these clouts suffer, the more brutal the heel that grinds them down, the sooner will the Emperor's money accomplish its work, the sooner will these wretches be clamouring for the monarchy, which would mean a rich reward in de Batz' pockets.

To him everything now was for the best; the tyranny, the brutality, the massacres. He gloated in the holocausts with as much satisfaction as did the most bloodthirsty Jacobin in the Convention. He would with his own hands have wielded the guillotine that worked too slowly for his ends. Let that end justify the means, was his motto. What matter if the future King of France walked up to his throne over steps made of headless corpses and rendered slippery with the blood of martyrs?

The ground beneath de Batz' feet was hard and white with the frost. Overhead the pale, wintry moon looked down serene and placid on this giant city wallowing in an ocean of misery.

There had been but little snow as yet this year, and the cold was intense. On his right now the Cimetière des SS. Innocents lay peaceful and still beneath the wan light of the moon. A thin covering of frost lay evenly alike on grass mounds and smooth stones. Here and there a broken cross with chipped arms still held pathetically outstretched, as if in a final appeal for human love, bore mute testimony to senseless excesses and spiteful desire for destruction.

But here—within the precincts of the dwelling of the eternal Master—a solemn silence reigned; only the cold north wind shook the branches of the yew, causing them to send forth a melancholy sigh into the night, and to shed a shower of tiny crystals like the frozen tears of the dead.

And round the precincts of the lonely graveyard, and down narrow streets or open places, the night watchmen went their rounds, lanthorn in hand, and every five minutes their monotonous call rang clearly out in the night:

"Sleep, citizens! everything is quiet and at peace."

We may take it that de Batz did not philosophize overmuch on what went on around him. He had walked swiftly up the Rue St. Martin, then turning sharply to his right he found himself beneath the tall, frowning walls of the Temple prison, the grim guardian of so many secrets, such terrible despair, such unspeakable tragedies.

Here, too, as in the Place de la Révolution, an intermittent roll of muffled drums proclaimed the ever-watchful presence of the National Guard. But with that exception not a sound stirred round the grim and stately edifice; there were no cries, no calls, no appeals around its walls. All the crying and wailing was shut in by the massive stone that told no tales.

Dim and flickering lights shone behind several of the small windows in the façade of the huge labyrinthine building. Without any hesitation de Batz turned down the Rue du Temple, and soon found himself in front of the main gates which gave on the courtyard beyond. The sentinel challenged him, but he had the pass-word, and explained that he desired to have speech with citizen Héron.

With a surly gesture the guard pointed to the heavy bell-pull up against the gate, and de Batz pulled it with all his might. The long clang of the brazen bell echoed and re-echoed round the solid stone walls. Anon a tiny judas in the gate was cautiously pushed open, and a peremptory voice once again challenged the midnight intruder.

De Batz, more peremptorily this time, asked for citizen Héron, with whom he had immediate and important business, and a glimmer of a piece of silver which he held up to the judas secured him the necessary admittance.

The massive gates slowly swung open on their creaking hinges, and as de Batz passed beneath the archway they closed again behind him.

The concierge's lodge was immediately on his left. Again he was challenged, and again gave the password. But his face was apparently known here, for no serious hindrance to proceed was put in his way.

A man, whose wide, lean frame was but ill-covered by a threadbare coat and ragged breeches, and with soleless shoes on his feet, was told off to direct the citoyen to citizen Héron's rooms. The man walked slowly along with bent knees and arched spine, and shuffled his feet as he walked; the bunch of keys which he carried rattled ominously in his long, grimy hands; the passages were badly lighted, and he also carried a lanthorn to guide himself on the way.

Closely followed by de Batz, he soon turned into the central corridor, which is open to the sky above, and was spectrally alight now with flag-stones and walls gleaming beneath the silvery sheen of the moon, and throwing back the fantastic elongated shadows of the two men as they walked.

On the left, heavily-barred windows gave on the corridor as did here and there the massive oaken doors, with their gigantic hinges and bolts, on the steps of which squatted groups of soldiers wrapped in their cloaks, with wild, suspicious eyes beneath their capotes, peering at the midnight visitor as he passed.

There was no thought of silence here. The very walls seemed alive with sounds, groans and tears, loud wails and murmured prayers; they exuded from the stones and trembled on the frost-laden air.

Occasionally at one of the windows a pair of white hands would appear, grasping the heavy iron bar, trying to shake it in its socket, and mayhap, above the hands, the dim vision of a haggard face, a man's or a woman's, trying to get a glimpse of the outside world, a final look at the sky, before the last journey to the place of death to-morrow. Then one of the soldiers, with a loud, angry oath, would struggle to his feet, and with the butt-end of his gun strike at the thin, wan fingers till their hold on the iron bar relaxed, and the pallid face beyond would sink back into the darkness with a desperate cry of pain.

A quick, impatient sigh escaped de Batz' lips. He had skirted the wide courtyard in the wake of his guide, and from where he was he could see the great central tower, with its tiny windows lighted from within, the grim walls behind which the descendant of the world's conquerors, the bearer of the proudest name in Europe, and wearer of its most ancient crown, had spent the last days of his brilliant life in abject shame, sorrow, and degradation. The memory had swiftly surged up before him of that night when he all but rescued King Louis and his family from this same miserable prison: the guard had been bribed, the keeper corrupted, everything had been prepared, save the reckoning with the one irresponsible factor—chance!

He had failed then and had tried again, and again had failed; a fortune had been his reward if he had succeeded. He had failed, but even now, when his footsteps echoed along the flagged courtyard, over which an unfortunate King and Queen had walked on their way to their last ignominious Calvary, he hugged himself with the satisfying thought that where he had failed at least no one else had succeeded.

Whether that meddlesome English adventurer, who called himself the Scarlet Pimpernel, had planned the rescue of King Louis or of Queen Marie Antoinette at any time or not—that he did not know; but on one point at least he was more than ever determined, and that was that no power on earth should snatch from him the golden prize offered by Austria for the rescue of the little Dauphin.

"I would sooner see the child perish, if I cannot save him myself," was the burning thought in this man's tortuous brain. "And let that accursed Englishman look to himself and to his d——d confederates," he added, muttering a fierce oath beneath his breath.

A winding, narrow stone stair, another length or two of corridor, and his guide's shuffling footsteps paused beside a low iron-studded door let into the solid stone. De Batz dismissed his ill-clothed guide and pulled the iron bell-handle which hung beside the door.

The bell gave forth a dull and broken clang, which seemed like an echo of the wails of sorrow that peopled the huge building with their weird and monotonous sounds.

De Batz—a thoroughly unimaginative person—waited patiently beside the door until it was opened from within, and he was confronted by a tall stooping figure, wearing a greasy coat of snuff-brown cloth, and holding high above his head a lanthorn that threw its feeble light on de Batz' jovial face and form.

"It is even I, citizen Héron," he said, breaking in swiftly on the other's ejaculation of astonishment, which threatened to send his name echoing the whole length of the corridors and passages, until round every corner of the labyrinthine house of sorrow the murmur would be borne on the wings of the cold night breeze: "Citizen Héron is in parley with ci-devant Baron de Batz!"

A fact which would have been equally unpleasant for both these worthies.

"Enter!" said Héron curtly.

He banged the heavy door to behind his visitor; and de Batz, who seemed to know his way about the place, walked straight across the narrow landing to where a smaller door stood invitingly open.

He stepped boldly in, the while citizen Héron put the lanthorn down on the floor of the couloir, and then followed his nocturnal visitor into the room.

6

THE COMMITTEE'S AGENT

It was a narrow, ill-ventilated place, with but one barred window that gave on the courtyard. An evil-smelling lamp hung by a chain from the grimy ceiling, and in a corner of the room a tiny iron stove shed more unpleasant vapour than warm glow around.

There was but little furniture; two or three chairs, a table which was littered with papers, and a corner-cupboard—the open doors of which revealed a miscellaneous collection—bundles of papers, a tin saucepan, a piece of cold sausage, and a couple of pistols. The fumes of stale tobacco-smoke hovered in the air, and mingled most unpleasantly with those of the lamp above, and of the mildew that penetrated through the walls just below the roof.

Héron pointed to one of the chairs, and then sat down on the other, close to the table, on which he rested his elbow. He picked up a short-stemmed pipe, which he had evidently laid aside at the sound of the bell, and having taken several deliberate long-drawn puffs from it, he said abruptly:

"Well, what is it now?"

In the meanwhile de Batz had made himself as much at home in this uncomfortable room as he possibly could. He had deposited his hat and cloak on one rickety rush-bottomed chair, and drawn another close to the fire. He sat down with one leg crossed over the other, his podgy beringed hand wandering with loving gentleness down the length of his shapely calf.

He was nothing if not complacent, and his complacency seemed highly to irritate his friend Héron.

"Well, what is it?" reiterated the latter, drawing his visitor's attention roughly to himself by banging his fist on the table. "Out with it! What do you want? Why have you come at this hour of the night—to compromise me, I suppose—bring your own d——d neck and mine into the same noose—what?"

"Easy, easy, my friend," responded de Batz imperturbably; "waste not so much time in idle talk. Why do I usually come to see you? Surely you have had no cause to complain hitherto of the unprofitableness of my visits to you?"

"They will have to be still more profitable to me in the future," growled the other across the table. "I have more power now."

"I know you have," said de Batz suavely. "The new decree? What? You may denounce whom you please, search whom you please, arrest whom you please, and send whom you please to the Supreme Tribunal without giving them the slightest chance of escape."

"Is it in order to tell me all this that you have come to see me at this hour of the night?" queried Héron with a sneer.

"No; I came at this hour of the night because I surmised that in the future you and your hell-hounds would be so busy all day 'beating up game for the guillotine' that the only time you would have at the disposal of your friends would be the late hours of the night. I saw you at the theatre a couple of hours ago, friend Héron; I didn't think to find you yet abed."

"Well, what do you want?"

"Rather," retorted de Batz blandly, "shall we say, what do *you* want, citizen Héron?"

"For what?"

"For my continued immunity at the hands of yourself and your pack?"

Héron pushed his chair brusquely aside and strode across the narrow room deliberately facing the portly figure of de Batz, who with head slightly inclined on one side, his small eyes narrowed till they appeared mere slits in his pock-marked face, was steadily and quite placidly contemplating this inhuman monster who had this very day been given uncontrolled power over hundreds of thousands of human lives.

Héron was one of those tall men who look mean in spite of their height. His head was small and narrow, and his hair, which was sparse and lank, fell in untidy strands across his forehead. He stooped slightly from the neck and his chest, though wide, was hollow between the shoulders. But his legs were big and bony, slightly bent at the knees, like those of an ill-conditioned horse.

The face was thin and the cheeks sunken; the eyes, very large and prominent, had a look in them of cold and ferocious cruelty, a look which contrasted strangely with the weakness and petty greed apparent in the mouth, which was flabby, with full, very red lips, and chin that sloped away to the long thin neck.

Even at this moment as he gazed on de Batz the greed and the cruelty in him were fighting one of those battles the issue of which is always uncertain in men of his stamp.

"I don't know," he said slowly, "that I am prepared to treat with you any longer. You are an intolerable bit of vermin that has annoyed the Committee of

General Security for over two years now. It would be excessively pleasant to crush you once and for all, as one would a buzzing fly."

"Pleasant, perhaps, but immeasurably foolish," rejoined de Batz coolly; "you would only get thirty-five livres for my head, and I offer you ten times that amount for the self-same commodity."

"I know, I know; but the whole thing has become too dangerous."

"Why? I am very modest. I don't ask a great deal. Let your hounds keep off my scent."

"You have too many d——d confederates."

"Oh! never mind about the others. I am not bargaining about them. Let them look after themselves."

"Every time we get a batch of them, one or the other denounces you."

"Under torture, I know," rejoined de Batz placidly, holding his podgy hands to the warm glow of the fire. "For you have started torture in your house of Justice now, eh, friend Héron? You and your friend the Public Prosecutor have gone the whole gamut of devilry—eh?"

"What's that to you?" retorted the other gruffly.

"Oh, nothing, nothing! I was even proposing to pay you three thousand five hundred livres for the privilege of taking no further interest in what goes on inside this prison!"

"Three thousand five hundred!" ejaculated Héron involuntarily, and this time even his eyes lost their cruelty; they joined issue with the mouth in an expression of hungering avarice.

"Two little zeros added to the thirty-five, which is all you would get for handing me over to your accursed Tribunal," said de Batz, and, as if thoughtlessly, his hand wandered to the inner pocket of his coat, and a slight rustle as of thin crisp paper brought drops of moisture to the lips of Héron.

"Leave me alone for three weeks and the money is yours," concluded de Batz pleasantly.

There was silence in the room now. Through the narrow barred window the steely rays of the moon fought with the dim yellow light of the oil lamp, and lit up the pale face of the Committee's agent with its lines of cruelty in sharp conflict with those of greed.

"Well! is it a bargain?" asked de Batz at last in his usual smooth, oily voice, as he half drew from out his pocket that tempting little bundle of crisp printed paper. "You have only to give me the usual receipt for the money and it is yours."

Héron gave a vicious snarl.

"It is dangerous, I tell you. That receipt, if it falls into some cursed meddler's hands, would send me straight to the guillotine."

"The receipt could only fall into alien hands," rejoined de Batz blandly, "if I happened to be arrested, and even in that case they could but fall into those of the chief agent of the Committee of General Security, and he hath name Héron. You must take some risks, my friend. I take them too. We are each in the other's hands. The bargain is quite fair."

For a moment or two longer Héron appeared to be hesitating, whilst de Batz watched him with keen intentness. He had no doubt himself as to the issue. He had tried most of these patriots in his own golden crucible, and had weighed their patriotism against Austrian money, and had never found the latter wanting.

He had not been here to-night if he were not quite sure. This inveterate conspirator in the Royalist cause never took personal risks. He looked on Héron now, smiling to himself the while with perfect satisfaction.

"Very well," said the Committee's agent with sudden decision, "I'll take the money. But on one condition."

"What is it?"

"That you leave little Capet alone."

"The Dauphin!"

"Call him what you like," said Héron, taking a step nearer to de Batz, and from his great height glowering down in fierce hatred and rage upon his accomplice; "call the young devil what you like, but leave us to deal with him."

"To kill him, you mean? Well, how can I prevent it, my friend?"

"You and your like are always plotting to get him out of here. I won't have it. I tell you I won't have it. If the brat disappears I am a dead man. Robespierre and his gang have told me as much. So you leave him alone, or I'll not raise a finger to help you, but will lay my own hands on your accursed neck."

He looked so ferocious and so merciless then, that despite himself, the selfish adventurer, the careless self-seeking intriguer, shuddered with a quick wave of unreasoning terror. He turned away from Héron's piercing gaze, the gaze of a hyena whose prey is being snatched from beneath its nails. For a moment he stared thoughtfully into the fire.

He heard the other man's heavy footsteps cross and recross the narrow room, and was conscious of the long curved shadow creeping up the mildewed wall or retreating down upon the carpetless floor.

Suddenly, without any warning, he felt a grip upon his shoulder. He gave a start and almost uttered a cry of alarm which caused Héron to laugh. The Committee's agent was vastly amused at his friend's obvious access of fear. There was nothing that he liked better than that he should inspire dread in the hearts of all those with whom he came in contact.

"I am just going on my usual nocturnal round," he said abruptly. "Come with me, citizen de Batz."

A certain grim humour was apparent in his face as he proffered this invitation, which sounded like a rough command. As de Batz seemed to hesitate he nodded peremptorily to him to follow. Already he had gone into the hall and picked up his lanthorn. From beneath his waistcoat he drew forth a bunch of keys, which he rattled impatiently, calling to his friend to come.

"Come, citizen," he said roughly. "I wish to show you the one treasure in this house which your d——d fingers must not touch."

Mechanically de Batz rose at last. He tried to be master of the terror which was invading his very bones. He would not own to himself even that he was afraid, and almost audibly he kept murmuring to himself that he had no cause for fear.

Héron would never touch him. The spy's avarice, his greed of money were a perfect safeguard for any man who had the control of millions, and Héron knew, of course, that he could make of this inveterate plotter a comfortable source of revenue for himself. Three weeks would soon be over, and fresh bargains could be made time and again, while de Batz was alive and free.

Héron was still waiting at the door, even whilst de Batz wondered what this nocturnal visitation would reveal to him of atrocity and of outrage. He made a final effort to master his nervousness, wrapped his cloak tightly around him, and followed his host out of the room.

7

THE MOST PRECIOUS LIFE IN EUROPE

Once more he was being led through the interminable corridors of the gigantic building. Once more from the narrow, barred windows close by him he heard the heart-breaking sighs, the moans, the curses which spoke of tragedies that he could only guess.

Héron was walking on ahead of him, preceding him by some fifty mètres or so, his long legs covering the distances more rapidly than de Batz could follow them. The latter knew his way well about the old prison. Few men in Paris possessed that accurate knowledge of its intricate passages and its network of cells and halls which de Batz had acquired after close and persevering study.

He himself could have led Héron to the doors of the tower where the little Dauphin was being kept imprisoned, but unfortunately he did not possess the keys that would open all the doors which led to it. There were sentinels at every gate, groups of soldiers at each end of every corridor, the great—now empty—courtyards, thronged with prisoners in the daytime, were alive with soldiery even now. Some walked up and down with fixed bayonet on shoulder, others sat in groups on the stone copings or squatted on the ground, smoking, or playing cards, but all of them were alert and watchful.

Héron was recognized everywhere the moment he appeared, and though in these days of equality no one presented arms, nevertheless every guard stood aside to let him pass, or when necessary opened a gate for the powerful chief agent of the Committee of General Security.

Indeed, de Batz had no keys such as these to open the way for him to the presence of the martyred little King.

Thus the two men wended their way on in silence, one preceding the other. De Batz walked leisurely, thoughtfully, taking stock of everything he saw—the gates, the barriers, the positions of sentinels and warders, of everything in fact that might prove a help or a hindrance presently, when the great enterprise would be hazarded. At last—still in the wake of Héron—he found himself once more behind the main entrance gate, underneath the archway on which gave the *guichet* of the concierge.

Here, too, there seemed to be an unnecessary number of soldiers: two were doing sentinel outside the *guichet*, but there were others in a file against the wall.

Héron rapped with his keys against the door of the concierge's lodge, then, as it was not immediately opened from within, he pushed it open with his foot.

"The concierge?" he queried peremptorily.

From a corner of the small panelled room there came a grunt and a reply:

"Gone to bed, quoi!"

The man who previously had guided de Batz to Héron's door slowly struggled to his feet. He had been squatting somewhere in the gloom, and had been roused by Héron's rough command. He slouched forward now still carrying a boot in one hand and a blacking brush in the other.

"Take this lanthorn, then," said the chief agent with a snarl directed at the sleeping concierge, "and come along. Why are you still here?" he added, as if in afterthought.

"The citizen concierge was not satisfied with the way I had done his boots," muttered the man, with an evil leer as he spat contemptuously on the floor; "an aristo, quoi? A hell of a place this . . . twenty cells to sweep out every day . . . and boots to clean for every aristo of a concierge or warder who demands it. . . . Is that work for a free born patriot, I ask?"

"Well, if you are not satisfied, citoyen Dupont," retorted Héron drily, "you may go when you like, you know . . . there are plenty of others ready to do your work. . . ."

"Nineteen hours a day, and ninteen sous by way of payment. . . . I have had fourteen days of this convict work. . . ."

He continued to mutter under his breath, whilst Héron, paying no further heed to him, turned abruptly towards a group of soldiers stationed outside.

"En avant, corporal!" he said; "bring four men with you . . . we go up to the tower."

The small procession was formed. On ahead the lanthorn-bearer, with arched spine and shaking knees, dragging shuffling footsteps along the corridor, then the corporal with two of his soldiers, then Héron closely followed by de Batz, and finally two more soldiers bringing up the rear.

Héron had given the bunch of keys to the man Dupont. The latter, on ahead, holding the lanthorn aloft, opened one gate after another. At each gate he waited for the little procession to file through, then he re-locked the gate and passed on.

Up two or three flights of winding stairs set in the solid stone, and the final heavy door was reached.

De Batz was meditating. Héron's precautions for the safe-guarding of the most precious life in Europe were more complete than he had anticipated. What lavish liberality would be required! what superhuman ingenuity and boundless courage in order to break down all the barriers that had been set up round that young life that flickered inside this grim tower!

Of these three requisites the corpulent, complacent intriguer possessed only the first in a considerable degree. He could be exceedingly liberal with the foreign money which he had at his disposal. As for courage and ingenuity, he believed that he possessed both, but these qualities had not served him in very good stead in the attempts which he had made at different times to rescue the unfortunate members of the Royal Family from prison. His overwhelming egotism would not admit for a moment that in ingenuity and pluck the Scarlet Pimpernel and his English followers could outdo him, but he did wish to make quite sure that they would not interfere with him in the highly remunerative work of saving the Dauphin.

Héron's impatient call roused him from these meditations. The little party had come to a halt outside the massive iron-studded door.

At a sign from the chief agent the soldiers stood at attention. He then called de Batz and the lanthorn-bearer to him.

He took a key from his breeches pocket, and with his own hand unlocked the heavy door. He curtly ordered the lanthorn-bearer and de Batz to go through, then he himself went in, and finally once more re-locked the door behind him, the soldiers remaining on guard on the landing outside.

Now the three men were standing in a square ante-chamber, dank and dark, devoid of furniture save for a large cupboard that filled the whole length of one wall; the others, mildewed and stained, were covered with a greyish paper, which here and there hung away in strips.

Héron crossed this ante-chamber, and with his knuckles rapped against a small door opposite.

"Holà!" he shouted. "Simon, mon vieux, tu es là?"

From the inner room came the sound of voices, a man's and a woman's, and now, as if in response to Héron's call, the shrill tones of a child. There was some shuffling, too, of footsteps, and some pushing about of furniture, then the door was opened, and a gruff voice invited the belated visitors to enter.

The atmosphere in this further room was so thick that at first de Batz was only conscious of the evil smells that pervaded it; smells which were made up of the fumes of tobacco, of burning coke, of a smoky lamp, and of stale food, and mingling through it all the pungent odour of raw spirits.

Héron had stepped briskly in, closely followed by de Batz. The man Dupont with a mutter of satisfaction put down his lanthorn and curled himself up in a corner of the ante-chamber. His interest in the spectacle so favoured by citizen Héron had apparently been exhausted by constant repetition.

De Batz looked round him with keen curiosity with which disgust was ready enough to mingle.

The room itself might have been a large one; it was almost impossible to judge of its size, so crammed was it with heavy and light furniture of every conceivable shape and type. There was a monumental wooden bedstead in one corner, a huge sofa covered in black horsehair in another. A large table stood in the centre of the room, and there were at least four capacious arm-chairs round it. There were wardrobes and cabinets, a diminutive washstand and a huge pier-glass, there were innumerable boxes and packing-cases, cane-bottomed chairs, and what-nots everywhere. The place looked like a depôt for second-hand furniture.

In the midst of all the litter de Batz at last became conscious of two people who stood staring at him and at Héron. He saw a man before him, somewhat fleshy of build, with smooth, mouse-coloured hair brushed away from a central parting, and ending in a heavy curl above each ear; the eyes were wide open and pale in colour, the lips unusually thick and with a marked downward droop. Close beside him stood a youngish-looking woman, whose unwieldy bulk, however, and pallid skin revealed the sedentary life and the ravages of ill-health.

Both appeared to regard Héron with a certain amount of awe, and de Batz with a vast measure of curiosity.

Suddenly the woman stood aside, and in the far corner of the room there was displayed to the Gascon Royalist's cold, calculating gaze the pathetic figure of the uncrowned King of France.

"How is it Capet is not yet in bed?" queried Héron as soon as he caught sight of the child.

"He wouldn't say his prayers this evening," replied Simon with a coarse laugh, "and wouldn't drink his medicine. Bah!" he added with a snarl, "this is a place for dogs and not for human folk."

"If you are not satisfied, mon vieux," retorted Héron curtly, "you can send in your resignation when you like. There are plenty who will be glad of the place."

The ex-cobbler gave another surly growl and expectorated on the floor in the direction where stood the child.

"Little vermin," he said, "he is more trouble than man or woman can bear."

The boy in the meanwhile seemed to take but little notice of the vulgar insults put upon him by his guardian. He stood, a quaint, impassive little figure, more interested apparently in de Batz, who was a stranger to him, than in the three others whom he knew. De Batz noted that the child looked well nourished, and that he was warmly clad in a rough woollen shirt and cloth breeches, with coarse grey stockings and thick shoes; but he also saw that the clothes were indescribably filthy, as were the child's hands and face. The golden curls, among which a young and queenly mother had once loved to pass her slender perfumed fingers, now hung bedraggled, greasy, and lank round the little face, from the lines of which every trace of dignity and of simplicity had long since been erased.

There was no look of the martyr about this child now, even though, mayhap, his small back had often smarted under his vulgar tutor's rough blows; rather did the pale young face wear the air of sullen indifference, and an abject desire to please, which would have appeared heart-breaking to any spectator less self-seeking and egotistic than was this Gascon conspirator.

Madame Simon had called him to her while her man and the citizen Héron were talking, and the child went readily enough, without any sign of fear. She took the corner of her coarse dirty apron in her hand, and wiped the boy's mouth and face with it.

"I can't keep him clean," she said with an apologetic shrug of the shoulders and a look at de Batz. "There now," she added, speaking once more to the child, "drink like a good boy, and say your lesson to please maman, and then you shall go to bed."

She took a glass from the table, which was filled with a clear liquid that de Batz at first took to be water, and held it to the boy's lips. He turned his head away and began to whimper.

"Is the medicine very nasty?" queried de Batz.

"Mon Dieu! but no, citizen," exclaimed the woman, "it is good strong eau de vie, the best that can be procured. Capet likes it really—don't you, Capet? It makes you happy and cheerful, and sleep well of nights. Why, you had a glassful yesterday and enjoyed it. Take it now," she added in a quick whisper, seeing that Simon and Héron were in close conversation together; "you know it makes papa angry if you don't have at least half a glass now and then."

The child wavered for a moment longer, making a quaint little grimace of distaste. But at last he seemed to make up his mind that it was wisest to yield over so small a matter, and he took the glass from Madame Simon.

And thus did de Batz see the descendant of St. Louis quaffing a glass of raw spirit at the bidding of a rough cobbler's wife, whom he called by the fond and foolish name sacred to childhood, *maman*!

Selfish egoist though he was, de Batz turned away in loathing.

Simon had watched the little scene with obvious satisfaction. He chuckled audibly when the child drank the spirit, and called Héron's attention to him, whilst a look of triumph lit up his wide, pale eyes.

"And now, mon petit," he said jovially, "let the citizen hear you say your prayers!"

He winked toward de Batz, evidently anticipating a good deal of enjoyment for the visitor from what was coming. From a heap of litter in a corner of the room he fetched out a greasy red bonnet adorned with a tricolour cockade, and a soiled and tattered flag, which had once been white, and had golden fleur-de-lys embroidered upon it.

The cap he set on the child's head, and the flag he threw upon the floor.

"Now, Capet—your prayers!" he said with another chuckle of amusement.

All his movements were rough, and his speech almost ostentatiously coarse. He banged against the furniture as he moved about the room, kicking a footstool out of the way or knocking over a chair. De Batz instinctively thought of the perfumed stillness of the rooms at Versailles, of the army of elegant high-born ladies who had ministered to the wants of this child, who stood there now before him, a cap on his yellow hair, and his shoulder held up to his ear with that gesture of careless indifference peculiar to children when they are sullen or uncared for.

Obediently, quite mechanically it seemed, the boy trod on the flag which Henri IV. had borne before him at Ivry, and *le Roi Soleil* had flaunted in the face of the armies of Europe. The son of the Bourbons was spitting on their flag, and wiping his shoes upon its tattered folds. With shrill cracked voice he sang the Carmagnole, "Ça ira! ça ira! les aristos à la lanterne!" until de Batz himself felt inclined to stop his ears and to rush from the place in horror.

Louis XVII., whom the hearts of many had proclaimed King of France by the grace of God, the child of the Bourbons, the eldest son of the Church, was stepping a vulgar dance over the flag of St. Louis, which he had been taught to defile. His pale cheeks glowed as he danced, his eyes shone with the unnatural light kindled in them by the intoxicating liquor; with one slender hand he waved the red cap with the tricolour cockade and shouted "Vive la République!"

Madame Simon was clapping her hands, looking on the child with obvious pride, and a kind of rough maternal affection. Simon was gazing on Héron for approval, and the latter nodded his head, murmuring words of encouragement and of praise.

"Thy catechism now, Capet—thy catechism," shouted Simon in a hoarse voice.

The boy stood at attention, cap on head, hands on his hips, legs wide apart, and feet firmly planted on the fleur-de-lys, the glory of his forefathers.

"Thy name?" queried Simon.

"Louis Capet," replied the child in a clear, high-pitched voice.

"What are thou?"

"A citizen of the Republic of France."

"What was thy father?"

"Louis Capet, ci-devant king, a tyrant who perished by the will of the people!"

"What was thy mother?"

"A——"

De Batz involuntarily uttered a cry of horror. Whatever the man's private character was, he had been born a gentleman, and his every instinct revolted against what he saw and heard. The scene had positively sickened him. He turned precipitately towards the door.

"How now, citizen?" queried the Committee's agent with a sneer. "Are you not satisfied with what you see?"

"Mayhap the citizen would like to see Capet sitting in a golden chair," interposed Simon the cobbler with a sneer, "and me and my wife kneeling and kissing his hand—what?"

"'Tis the heat of the room," stammered de Batz, who was fumbling with the lock of the door; "my head began to swim."

"Spit on their accursed flag, then, like a good patriot, like Capet," retorted Simon gruffly. "Here, Capet, my son," he added, pulling the boy by the arm with a rough gesture, "get thee to bed; thou art quite drunk enough to satisfy any good Republican."

By way of a caress he tweaked the boy's ear and gave him a prod in the back with his bent knee. He was not wilfully unkind, for just now he was not angry with the lad; rather was he vastly amused with the effect Capet's prayer and Capet's recital of his catechism had had on the visitor.

As to the lad, the intensity of excitement in him was immediately followed by an overwhelming desire for sleep. Without any preliminary of undressing or of washing, he tumbled, just as he was, on to the sofa. Madame Simon, with quite pleasing solicitude, arranged a pillow under his head, and the very next moment the child was fast asleep.

"'Tis well, citoyen Simon," said Héron, in his turn, going towards the door. "I'll report favourably on you to the Committee of Public Security. As for the citoyenne she had best be more careful," he added, turning to the woman Simon with a snarl on his evil face. "There was no cause to arrange a pillow under the head of that vermin's spawn. Many good patriots have no pillows to put under their heads. Take that pillow away; and I don't like the shoes on the brat's feet; sabots are quite good enough."

Citoyenne Simon made no reply. Some sort of retort had apparently hovered on her lips, but had been checked, even before it was uttered, by a peremptory look from her husband. Simon the cobbler, snarling in speech but obsequious in manner, prepared to accompany the citizen agent to the door.

De Batz was taking a last look at the sleeping child; the uncrowned King of France was wrapped in a drunken sleep, with the last unspoken insult upon his dead mother still hovering on his childish lips.

8

ARCADES AMBO

"THAT is the way we conduct our affairs, citizen," said Héron gruffly, as he once more led his guest back into his office.

It was his turn to be complacent now. De Batz, for once in his life cowed by what he had seen, still wore a look of horror and disgust upon his florid face.

"What devils you all are!" he said at last.

"We are good patriots," retorted Héron, "and the tyrant's spawn leads but the life that hundreds of thousands of children led whilst his father oppressed the people. Nay! what am I saying? He leads a far better, far happier life. He gets plenty to eat and plenty of warm clothes. Thousands of innocent children, who have not the crimes of a despot father upon their consciences, have to starve whilst he grows fat."

The leer in his face was so evil that once more de Batz felt that eerie feeling of terror creeping into his bones. Here were cruelty and bloodthirsty ferocity personified to their utmost extent. At thought of the Bourbons, or of all those whom he considered had been in the past the oppressors of the people, Héron was nothing but a wild and ravenous beast, hungering for revenge, longing to bury his talons and his fangs into the body of those whose heels had once pressed on his own neck.

And de Batz knew that even with millions or countless money at his command he could not purchase from this carnivorous brute the life and liberty of the son of King Louis. No amount of bribery would accomplish that; it would have to be ingenuity pitted against animal force, the wiliness of the fox against the power of the wolf.

Even now Héron was darting savagely suspicious looks upon him.

"I shall get rid of the Simons," he said; "there's something in that woman's face which I don't trust. They shall go within the next few hours, or as soon as I can lay my hands upon a better patriot than that mealy-mouthed cobbler. And it will be better not to have a woman about the place. Let me see—to-day is Thursday, or else Friday morning. By Sunday I'll get those Simons out of the place. Methought I saw you ogling that woman," he added, bringing his bony fist crashing down on the table so that papers, pen, and inkhorn rattled loudly; "and if I thought that you——"

De Batz thought it well at this point to finger once more nonchalantly the bundle of crisp paper in the pocket of his coat.

"Only on that one condition," reiterated Héron in a hoarse voice; "if you try to get at Capet, I'll drag you to the Tribunal with my own hands."

"Always presuming that you can get me, my friend," murmured de Batz, who was gradually regaining his accustomed composure.

Already his active mind was busily at work. One or two things which he had noted in connexion with his visit to the Dauphin's prison had struck him as possibly useful in his schemes. But he was disappointed that Héron was getting rid of the Simons. The woman might have been very useful and more easily got at than a man. The avarice of the French bourgeoise would have proved a promising factor. But this, of course, would now be out of the question. At the same time it was not because Héron raved and stormed and uttered cries like a hyena that he, de Batz, meant to give up an enterprise which, if successful, would place millions into his own pocket.

As for that meddling Englishman, the Scarlet Pimpernel, and his crack-brained followers, they must be effectually swept out of the way first of all. De Batz felt that they were the real, the most likely hindrance to his schemes. He himself would have to go very cautiously to work, since apparently Héron would not allow him to purchase immunity for himself in that one matter, and whilst he was laying his plans with necessary deliberation so as to ensure his own safety, that accursed Scarlet Pimpernel would mayhap snatch the golden prize from the Temple Prison right under his very nose.

When he thought of that the Gascon Royalist felt just as vindictive as did the chief agent of the Committee of General Security.

While these thoughts were coursing through de Batz' head, Héron had been indulging in a volley of vituperation.

"If that little vermin escapes," he said, "my life will not be worth an hour's purchase. In twenty-four hours I am a dead man, thrown to the guillotine like those dogs of aristocrats! You say I am a night bird, citizen. I tell you that I do not sleep night or day thinking of that brat and the means to keep him safely under my hand. I have never trusted those Simons——"

"Not trusted them!" exclaimed de Batz; "surely you could not find anywhere more inhuman monsters!"

"Inhuman monsters?" snarled Héron. "Bah! they don't do their business thoroughly; we want the tyrant's spawn to become a true Republican and a patriot—aye! to make of him such an one that even if you and your cursed confederates got him by some hellish chance, he would be no use to you as a king, a tyrant to set above the people, to set up in your Versailles, your Louvre, to eat off golden plates and wear satin clothes. You have seen the brat! By the time he is a man he should forget how to eat save with his fingers, and get roaring drunk every night. That's what we want!—to make him so that he shall be no use to you, even if you did get him away; but you shall not! You shall not, not if I have to strangle him with my own hands."

He picked up his short-stemmed pipe and pulled savagely at it for awhile. De Batz was meditating.

"My friend," he said after a little while, "you are agitating yourself quite unnecessarily, and gravely jeopardizing your prospects of getting a comfortable little income through keeping your fingers off my person. Who said I wanted to meddle with the child?"

"You had best not," growled Héron.

"Exactly. You have said that before. But do you not think that you would be far wiser, instead of directing your undivided attention to my unworthy self, to turn your thoughts a little to one whom, believe me, you have far greater cause to fear?"

"Who is that?"

"The Englishman."

"You mean the man they call the Scarlet Pimpernel?"

"Himself. Have you not suffered from his activity, friend Héron? I fancy that citizen Chauvelin and citizen Collot would have quite a tale to tell about him."

"They ought both to have been guillotined for that blunder last autumn at Boulogne."

"Take care that the same accusation be not laid at your door this year, my friend," commented de Batz placidly.

"Bah!"

"The Scarlet Pimpernel is in Paris even now."

"The devil he is!"

"And on what errand, think you?"

There was a moment's silence, and then de Batz continued with slow and dramatic emphasis:

"That of rescuing your most precious prisoner from the Temple."

"How do you know?" Héron queried savagely.

"I guessed."

"How?"

"I saw a man in the Théâtre National to-day . . ."

"Well?"

"Who is a member of the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel."

"D—— him! Where can I find him?"

"Will you sign a receipt for the three thousand five hundred livres, which I am pining to hand over to you, my friend, and I will tell you?"

"Where's the money?"

"In my pocket."

Without further words Héron dragged the inkhorn and a sheet of paper towards him, took up a pen, and wrote a few words rapidly in a loose, scrawly hand. He strewed sand over the writing, then handed it across the table to de Batz.

"Will that do?" he asked briefly.

The other was reading the note through carefully.

"I see you only grant me a fortnight," he remarked casually.

"For that amount of money it is sufficient. If you want an extension you must pay more."

"So be it," assented de Batz coolly, as he folded the paper across. "On the whole a fortnight's immunity in France these days is quite a pleasant respite. And I prefer to keep in touch with you, friend Héron. I'll call on you again this day fortnight."

He took out a letter-case from his pocket. Out of this he drew a packet of bank-notes, which he laid on the table in front of Héron, then he placed the receipt carefully into the letter-case, and this back into his pocket.

Héron in the meanwhile was counting over the bank-notes. The light of ferocity had entirely gone from his eyes; momentarily the whole expression of the face was one of satisfied greed.

"Well!" he said at last when he had assured himself that the number of notes was quite correct, and he had transferred the bundle of crisp papers into an inner pocket of his coat—"well, what about your friend?"

"I knew him years ago," rejoined de Batz coolly; "he is a kinsman of citizen St. Just. I know that he is one of the confederates of the Scarlet Pimpernel."

"Where does he lodge?"

"That is for you to find out. I saw him at the theatre and afterwards in the green-room; he was making himself agreeable to the citizeness Lange. I heard him ask for leave to call on her to-morrow at four o'clock. You know where she lodges, of course!"

He watched Héron while the latter scribbled a few words on a scrap of paper, then he quietly rose to go. He took up his cloak and once again wrapped it round his shoulders. There was nothing more to be said, and he was anxious to go.

The leave-taking between the two men was neither cordial nor more than barely courteous. De Batz nodded to Héron, who escorted him to the outside door of his lodging, and there called loudly to a soldier who was doing sentinel at the further end of the corridor.

"Show this citizen the way to the *guichet*," he said curtly. "Good night, citizen," he added finally, nodding to de Batz.

Ten minutes later the Gascon once more found himself in the Rue du Temple between the great outer walls of the prison and the silent little church and convent of St. Elizabeth. He looked up to where in the central tower a small grated window lighted from within showed the place where the last of the Bourbons was being taught to desecrate the traditions of his race, at the bidding of a mender of shoes—a naval officer cashiered for misconduct and fraud.

Such is human nature in its self-satisfied complacency that de Batz, calmly ignoring the vile part which he himself had played in the last quarter of an hour of his interview with the Committee's agent, found it in him to think of Héron with loathing, and even of the cobbler Simon with disgust.

Then with a self-righteous sense of duty performed, and an indifferent shrug of the shoulders, he dismissed Héron from his mind.

"That meddlesome Scarlet Pimpernel will find his hands over-full to-morrow, and mayhap will not interfere in my affairs for some time to come," he mused; "meseems that that will be the first time that a member of his precious League has come within the clutches of such unpleasant people as the sleuth-hounds of my friend Héron!"

9

WHAT LOVE CAN DO

"YESTERDAY you were unkind and ungallant. How could I smile when you seemed so stern?"

"Yesterday I was not alone with you. How could I say what lay next my heart, when indifferent ears could catch the words that were meant only for you?"

"Ah, monsieur, do they teach you in England how to make pretty speeches?"

"No, mademoiselle, that is an instinct that comes into birth by the fire of a woman's eyes."

Mademoiselle Lange was sitting upon a small sofa of antique design, with cushions covered in faded silks heaped round her pretty head. Armand thought that she looked like that carved cameo which his sister Marguerite possessed.

He himself sat on a low chair at some distance from her. He had brought her a large bunch of early violets, for he knew that she was fond of flowers, and these lay upon her lap, against the opalescent grey of her gown.

She seemed a little nervous and agitated, his obvious admiration bringing a ready blush to her cheeks.

The room itself appeared to Armand to be a perfect frame for the charming picture which she presented.

The furniture in it was small and old: tiny tables of antique Vernis-Martin, softly faded tapestries, a pale-toned Aubusson carpet. Everything mellow and in a measure pathetic. Mademoiselle Lange, who was an orphan, lived alone under the duennaship of a middle-aged relative, a penniless hanger-on of the successful young actress, who acted as her chaperone, housekeeper and maid, and kept unseemly or over-bold gallants at bay.

She told Armand all about her early life, her childhood in the back-shop of Maître Mézière, the jeweller, who was a relative of her mother's; of her desire for an artistic career, her struggles with the middle-class prejudices of her relations, her bold defiance of them, and final independence.

She made no secret of her humble origin, her want of education in those days; on the contrary, she was proud of what she had accomplished for herself. She was only twenty years of age, and already held a leading place in the artistic world of Paris.

Armand listened to her chatter, interested in everything she said, questioning her with sympathy and discretion. She asked him a good deal about himself, and about his beautiful sister Marguerite, who, of course, had been the most brilliant star in that most brilliant constellation, the Comédie Française. She had never seen Marguerite St. Just act, but, of course, Paris still rang with her praises, and all art-lovers regretted that she should have married and left them to mourn for her.

Thus the conversation drifted naturally back to England. Mademoiselle professed a vast interest in the citizen's country of adoption.

"I had always," she said, "thought it an ugly country, with the noise and bustle of industrial life going on everywhere, and smoke and fog to cover the landscape and to stunt the trees."

"Then, in future, mademoiselle," he replied, "must you think of it as one carpeted with verdure, where in the spring the orchard trees covered with delicate blossom would speak to you of fairyland, where the dewy grass stretches its velvety surface in the shadow of ancient monumental oaks, and ivy-covered towers rear their stately crowns to the sky.

"And the Scarlet Pimpernel? Tell me about him, monsieur."

"Ah, mademoiselle, what can I tell you that you do not already know? The Scarlet Pimpernel is a man who has devoted his entire existence to the benefit of suffering mankind. He has but one thought, and that is for those who need him; he hears but one sound—the cry of the oppressed."

"But they do say, monsieur, that philanthropy plays but a sorry part in your hero's schemes. They aver that he looks on his own efforts and the adventures through which he goes only in the light of sport."

"Like all Englishmen, mademoiselle, the Scarlet Pimpernel is a little ashamed of sentiment. He would deny its very existence with his lips, even whilst his noble heart brimmed over with it. Sport? Well! mayhap the sporting instinct is as keen as that of charity—the race for lives, the tussle for the rescue of human creatures, the throwing of a life on the hazard of a die."

"They fear him in France, monsieur. He has saved so many whose death had been decreed by the Committee of Public Safety."

"Please God, he will save many yet."

"Ah, monsieur, the poor little boy in the Temple Prison!"

"He has your sympathy, mademoiselle?"

"Of every right-minded woman in France, monsieur. Oh!" she added with a pretty gesture of enthusiasm, clasping her hands together, and looking at Armand with large eyes filled with tears, "if your noble Scarlet Pimpernel will do aught to save that poor innocent lamb, I would indeed bless him in my heart, and help him with all my humble might if I could."

"May God's saints bless you for those words, mademoiselle," he said, whilst, carried away by her beauty, her charm, her perfect femininity, he stooped towards her until his knee touched the carpet at her feet. "I had begun to lose my belief in my poor misguided country, to think all men in France vile, and all women base. I could thank you on my knees for your sweet words of sympathy, for the expression of tender motherliness that came into your eyes when you spoke of the poor forsaken Dauphin in the Temple."

She did not restrain her tears; with her they came very easily, just as with a child, and as they gathered in her eyes and rolled down her fresh cheeks they in no way marred the charm of her face. One hand lay in her lap fingering a diminutive bit of cambric, which from time to time she pressed to her eyes. The other she had almost unconsciously yielded to Armand.

The scent of the violets filled the room. It seemed to emanate from her, a fitting attribute of her young, wholly unsophisticated girlhood. The citizen was goodly to look at; he was kneeling at her feet, and his lips were pressed against her hand.

Armand was young and he was an idealist. I do not for a moment imagine that just at this moment he was deeply in love. The stronger feeling had not yet risen up in him; it came later when tragedy encompassed him and brought passion to sudden maturity. Just now he was merely yielding himself up to the intoxicating moment, with all the abandonment, all the enthusiasm of the Latin race. There was no reason why he should not bend the knee before this exquisite little cameo, that by its very presence was giving him an hour of perfect pleasure and of æsthetic joy.

Outside the world continued its hideous, relentless way; men butchered one another, fought and hated. Here in this small old-world *salon*, with its faded satins and bits of ivory-tinted lace, the outer universe had never really penetrated. It was a tiny world—quite apart from the rest of mankind, perfectly and absolutely beautiful.

If Armand had been allowed to depart from here now, without having been the cause as well as the chief actor in the events that followed, no doubt that Mademoiselle Lange would always have remained a charming memory with him, an exquisite bouquet of violets pressed reverently between the leaves of a favourite book of poems, and the scent of spring flowers would in after years have ever brought her dainty picture to his mind.

He was murmuring pretty words of endearment; carried away by emotion, his arm stole round her waist; he felt that if another tear came like a dewdrop rolling down her cheek he must kiss it away at its very source. Passion was not sweeping them off their feet—not yet, for they were very young, and life had not as yet presented to them its most unsolvable problem.

But they yielded to one another, to the springtime of their life, calling for Love, which would come presently hand in hand with his grim attendant, Sorrow.

Even as Armand's glowing face was at last lifted up to hers asking with mute lips for that first kiss which she already was prepared to give, there came the loud noise of men's heavy footsteps tramping up the old oak stairs, then some shouting, a woman's cry, and the next moment Madame Belhomme, trembling, wide-eyed, and in obvious terror, came rushing into the room.

"Jeanne! Jeanne! My child! It is awful! It is awful! Mon Dieu—mon Dieu! What is to become of us?"

She was moaning and lamenting even as she ran in, and now she threw her apron over her face and sank into a chair, continuing her moaning and her lamentations.

Neither Mademoiselle nor Armand had stirred. They remained like graven images, he on one knee, she with large eyes fixed upon his face. They had neither of them looked on the old woman; they seemed even now unconscious of her presence. But their ears had caught the sound of that measured tramp of feet up the stairs of the old house, and the halt upon the landing; they had heard the brief words of command:

"Open in the name of the people!"

They knew quite well what it all meant; they had not wandered so far in the realms of romance that reality—the grim, horrible reality of the moment—had not the power to bring them back to earth.

That peremptory call to open in the name of the people was the prologue these days to a drama which had but two concluding acts: arrest, which was a certainty; the guillotine, which was more than probable. Jeanne and Armand, these two young people who but a moment ago had tentatively lifted the veil of life, looked straight into each other's eyes and saw the hand of death interposed between them. They looked straight into each other's eyes and knew that nothing but the hand of death would part them now. Love had come with its attendant, Sorrow; but he had come with no uncertain footsteps. Jeanne looked on the man before her, and he bent his head to imprint a glowing kiss upon her hand.

"Aunt Marie!"

It was Jeanne Lange who spoke, but her voice was no longer that of an irresponsible child; it was firm, steady and hard. Though she spoke to the old woman, she did not look at her; her luminous brown eyes rested on the bowed head of Armand St. Just.

"Aunt Marie!" she repeated more peremptorily, for the old woman, with her apron over her head, was still moaning and unconscious of all save an overmastering fear.

"Open, in the name of the people!" came in a loud harsh voice once more from the other side of the front door.

"Aunt Marie, as you value your life and mine, pull yourself together," said Jeanne firmly.

"What shall we do? Oh! what shall we do?" moaned Madame Belhomme. But she had dragged the apron away from her face, and was looking with some puzzlement at meek, gentle little Jeanne, who had suddenly become so strange, so dictatorial, all unlike her habitual somewhat diffident self.

"You need not have the slightest fear, Aunt Marie, if you will only do as I tell you," resumed Jeanne quietly; "if you give way to fear we are all of us undone. As you value your life and mine," she now repeated authoritatively, "pull yourself together, and do as I tell you."

The girl's firmness, her perfect quietude had the desired effect. Madame Belhomme, though still shaken up with sobs of terror, made a great effort to master herself; she stood up, smoothed down her apron, passed her hand over her ruffled hair, and said in a quaking voice:

"What do you think we had better do?"

"Go quietly to the door and open it."

"But—the soldiers——"

"If you do not open quietly they will force the door open within the next two minutes," interposed Jeanne calmly. "Go quietly and open the door. Try and hide your fears, grumble in an audible voice at being interrupted in your cooking, and tell the soldiers at once that they will find mademoiselle in the boudoir. Go, for God's sake!" she added, whilst suppressed emotion suddenly made her young voice vibrate; "go, before they break open that door!"

Madame Belhomme, impressed and cowed, obeyed like an automaton. She turned and marched fairly straight out of the room. It was not a minute too soon. From outside had already come the third and final summons:

"Open, in the name of the people!"

After that a crowbar would break open the door.

Madame Belhomme's heavy footsteps were heard crossing the ante-chamber. Armand still knelt at Jeanne's feet, holding her trembling little hand in his.

"A love-scene," she whispered rapidly, "a love-scene—quick—do you know one?"

And even as he had tried to rise she held him back, down on his knees.

He thought that fear was making her distracted.

"Mademoiselle——" he murmured, trying to soothe her.

"Try and understand," she said with wonderful calm, "and do as I tell you. Aunt Marie has obeyed. Will you do likewise?"

"To the death!" he whispered eagerly.

"Then a love-scene," she entreated. "Surely you know one. Rodrigue and Chimène! Surely—surely," she urged, even as tears of anguish rose into her eyes, "you must, or, if not that, something else. Quick! The very seconds are precious!"

They were indeed! Madame Belhomme, obedient as a frightened dog, had gone to the door and opened it; even her well-feigned grumblings could now be heard and the rough interrogations from the soldiery.

"Citizeness Lange!" said a gruff voice.

"In her boudoir, quoi!"

Madame Belhomme, braced up apparently by fear, was playing her part remarkably well.

"Bothering good citizens! On baking day, too!" she went on grumbling and muttering.

"Oh, think—think!" murmured Jeanne now in an agonized whisper, her hot little hand grasping his so tightly that her nails were driven into his flesh. "You must know something that will do—anything—for dear life's sake. . . . Armand!"

His name—in the tense excitement of this terrible moment—had escaped her lips.

All in a flash of sudden intuition he understood what she wanted, and even as the door of the boudoir was thrown violently open Armand—still on his knees, but with one hand pressed to his heart, the other stretched upwards to the ceiling in the most approved dramatic style was loudly declaiming:

Pour venger son honneur il perdit son amour,
Pour venger sa maîtresse il a quitté le jour!

Whereupon Mademoiselle Lange feigned the most perfect impatience.

"No, no, my good cousin," she said with a pretty *moue* of disdain, "that will never do! You must not thus emphasize the end of every line; the verses should flow more evenly, as thus. . . ."

Héron had paused at the door. It was he who had thrown it open—he who, followed by a couple of his sleuth-hounds, had thought to find here the man denounced by de Batz as being one of the followers of that irrepressible Scarlet Pimpernel. The obviously Parisian intonation of the man kneeling in front of citizeness Lange in an attitude no ways suggestive of personal admiration, and coolly reciting verses out of a play, had somewhat taken him aback.

"What does this mean?" he asked gruffly, striding forward into the room and glaring first at mademoiselle, then at Armand.

Mademoiselle gave a little cry of surprise.

"Why, if it isn't citizen Héron!" she cried, jumping up with a dainty movement of coquetry and embarrassment. "Why did not Aunt Marie announce you? . . . It is indeed remiss of her, but she is so ill-tempered on baking days I dare not even rebuke her. Won't you sit down, citizen Héron? And you, cousin," she added, looking down airily on Armand, "I pray you maintain no longer that foolish attitude."

The febrileness of her manner, the glow in her cheeks were easily attributable to natural shyness in face of this unexpected visit. Héron, completely bewildered by this little scene, which was so unlike what he expected, and so unlike those to which he was accustomed in the exercise of his horrible duties, was practically speechless before the little lady who continued to prattle along in a simple, unaffected manner.

"Cousin," she said to Armand, who in the meanwhile had risen to his knees, "this is citizen Héron, of whom you have heard me speak. My cousin Belhomme," she continued, once more turning to Héron, "is fresh from the country, citizen. He hails from Orléans, where he has played leading parts in the tragedies of the late citizen Corneille. But, ah me! I fear that he will find Paris audiences vastly more critical than the good Orléanese. Did you hear him, citizen, declaiming those beautiful verses just now? He was murdering them, say I—yes, murdering them—the gaby!"

Then only did it seem as if she realized that there was something amiss, that citizen Héron had come to visit her, not as an admirer of her talent who would wish to pay his respects to a successful actress, but as a person to be looked on with dread.

She gave a quaint, nervous little laugh, and murmured in the tones of a frightened child:

"La, citizen, how glum you look! I thought you had come to compliment me on my latest success. I saw you at the theatre last night, though you did not afterwards come to see me in the green-room. Why! I had a regular ovation! Look at my flowers!" she added more gaily, pointing to several bouquets in vases about the room. "Citizen Danton brought me the violets himself, and citizen Santerre the narcissi, and that laurel wreath—is it not charming?—that was a tribute from citizen Robespierre himself."

She was so artless, so simple, and so natural that Héron was completely taken off his usual mental balance. He had expected to find the usual setting to the dramatic episodes which he was wont to conduct

—screaming women, a man either at bay, sword in hand, or hiding in a linen cupboard or up a chimney.

Now everything puzzled him. De Batz—he was quite sure—had spoken of an Englishman, a follower of the Scarlet Pimpernel; every thinking French patriot knew that all the followers of the Scarlet Pimpernel were Englishmen with red hair and prominent teeth, whereas this man. . . .

Armand—whom deadly danger had primed in his improvised *rôle*—was striding up and down the room declaiming with ever-varying intonations:

> Joignez tous vos efforts contre un espoir si doux
> Pour en venir à bout, c'est trop peu que de vous.

"No! no!" said mademoiselle impatiently; "you must not make that ugly pause midway in the last line: 'pour en venir à bout, c'est trop peu que de vous!'"

She mimicked Armand's diction so quaintly, imitating his stride, his awkward gesture, and his faulty phraseology with such funny exaggeration that Héron laughed in spite of himself.

"So that is a cousin from Orléans, is it?" he asked, throwing his lanky body into an arm-chair, which creaked dismally under his weight.

"Yes! a regular gaby—what?" she said archly. "Now, citizen Héron, you must stay and take coffee with me. Aunt Marie will be bringing it in directly. Hector," she added, turning to Armand, "come down from the clouds and ask Aunt Marie to be quick."

This certainly was the first time in the whole of his experience that Héron had been asked to stay and drink coffee with the quarry he was hunting down. Mademoiselle's innocent little ways, her desire for the prolongation of his visit, further addled his brain.

De Batz had undoubtedly spoken of an Englishman and the cousin from Orléans was certainly a Frenchman every inch of him.

Perhaps had the denunciation come from anyone else but de Batz, Héron might have acted and thought more circumspectly; but, of course, the chief agent of the Committee of General Security was more suspicious of the man from whom he took a heavy bribe than of anyone else in France. The thought had suddenly crossed his mind that mayhap de Batz had sent him on a fool's errand in order to get him safely out of the way of the Temple Prison at a given hour of the day.

The thought took shape, crystallized, caused him to see a rapid vision of de Batz sneaking into his lodgings and stealing his keys, the guard being slack, careless, inattentive, allowing the adventurer to pass barriers that should have been closed against all comers.

Now Héron was sure of it; it was all a conspiracy invented by de Batz. He had forgotten all about his theories that a man under arrest is always safer than a man that is free. Had his brain been quite normal, and not obsessed, as it always was now by thoughts of the Dauphin's escape from prison, no doubt he would have been more suspicious of Armand, but all his worst suspicions were directed against de Batz. Armand seemed to him just a fool, an actor! *quoi?* and so obviously not an Englishman!

He jumped to his feet, curtly declining mademoiselle's offers of hospitality. He wanted to get away at once. Actors and actresses were always, by tacit consent of the authorities, more immune than the rest of the community. They provided the only amusement in the intervals of the horrible scenes around the scaffolds; they were irresponsible, harmless creatures who did not meddle in politics.

Jeanne the while was gaily prattling on, her luminous eyes fixed upon the all-powerful enemy, striving to read his thoughts, to understand what went on behind those cruel, prominent eyes, the chances that Armand had of safety and of life.

She knew, of course, that the visit was directed against Armand—some one had betrayed him, that odious de Batz mayhap—and she was fighting for Armand's safety, for his life. Her armoury consisted of her presence of mind, her cool courage, her self-control; she used all these weapons for his sake, though at times she felt as if the strain on her nerves would snap the thread of life in her. The effort seemed more than she could bear.

But she kept up her part, rallying Héron for the shortness of his visit, begging him to tarry for another five minutes at least, throwing out—with subtle feminine intuition—just those very hints anent little Capet's safety that were most calculated to send him flying back towards the Temple.

"I felt so honoured last night, citizen," she said coquettishly, "that you even forgot little Capet in order to come and watch my début, as Célimène."

"Forget him!" retorted Héron, smothering a curse, "I never forget the vermin. I must go back to him; there are too many cats nosing round my mouse. Good day to you, citizeness. I ought to have brought flowers, I know; but I am a busy man—a harassed man."

"Je te crois," she said with a grave nod of the head; "but do come to the theatre to-night. I am playing Camille—such a fine part! one of my greatest successes."

"Yes, yes, I'll come—mayhap, mayhap—but I'll go now—glad to have seen you, citizeness. Where does your cousin lodge?" he asked abruptly.

"Here," she replied boldly, on the spur of the moment.

"Good. Let him report himself to-morrow morning at the Conciergie, and get his certificate of safety. It is a new decree, and you should have one, too."

"Very well, then. Hector and I will come together, and perhaps Aunt Marie will come, too. Don't send us to maman guillotine yet awhile, citizen," she said lightly; "you will never get such another Camille, nor yet so good a Célimène."

She was gay, artless to the last. She accompanied Héron to the door herself, chaffing him about his escort.

"You are an aristo, citizen," she said, gazing with well-feigned admiration on the two sleuth-hounds who stood in wait in the ante-room; "it makes me proud to see so many citizens at my door. Come and see me play Camille—come to-night, and don't forget the green-room door—it will always be kept invitingly open for you."

She bobbed him a curtsy, and he walked out, closely followed by his two men; then at last she closed the door behind them. She stood there for awhile, her ear glued against the massive panels, listening for their measured tread down the oak staircase. At last it rang more sharply against the flagstones of the courtyard below; then she was satisfied that they had gone, and went slowly back to the boudoir.

10

SHADOWS

THE tension on her nerves relaxed; there was the inevitable reaction. Her knees were shaking under her, and she literally staggered into the room.

But Armand was already near her, down on both his knees this time, his arms clasping the delicate form that swayed like the slender stems of narcissi in the breeze.

"Oh! you must go out of Paris at once—at once," she said through sobs which no longer would be kept back. "He'll return—I know that he will return—and you will not be safe until you are back in England."

But he could not think of himself or of anything in the future. He had forgotten Héron, Paris, the world; he could only think of her.

"I owe my life to you!" he murmured. "Oh, how beautiful you are—how brave! How I love you!"

It seemed that he had always loved her, from the moment that first in his boyish heart he had set up an ideal to worship, and then, last night, in the box of the theatre—he had his back turned toward the stage, and was ready to go—her voice had called him back; it had held him spellbound; her voice, and also her eyes. . . . He did not know then that it was Love which then and there had enchained him. Oh, how foolish he had been! for now he knew that he had loved her with all his might, with all his soul, from the very instant that his eyes had rested upon her.

He babbled along—incoherently—in the intervals of covering her hands and the hem of her gown with kisses. He stooped right down to the ground and kissed the arch of her instep; he had become a devotee worshipping at the shrine of his saint, who had performed a great and a wonderful miracle.

Armand the idealist had found his ideal in a woman. That was the great miracle which the woman herself had performed for him. He found in her all that he had admired most, all that he had admired in the leader who hitherto had been the only personification of his ideal. But Jeanne possessed all those qualities which had roused his enthusiasm in the noble hero he revered. Her pluck, her ingenuity, her calm devotion which had averted the threatened danger from him!

What had he done that she should have risked her own sweet life for his sake?

But Jeanne did not know. She could not tell. Her nerves now were somewhat unstrung, and the tears that always came so readily to her eyes flowed quite unchecked. She could not very well move, for he held her knees imprisoned in his arms, but she was quite content to remain like this, and to yield her hands to him so that he might cover them with kisses.

Indeed, she did not know at what precise moment love for him had been born in her heart. Last night, perhaps . . . she could not say . . . but when they parted she felt that she must see him again . . . and then to-day . . . perhaps it was the scent of the violets . . . they were so exquisitely sweet . . . perhaps it was his enthusiasm and his talk about England . . . but when Héron came she knew that she must save Armand's life at all costs . . . that she would die if they dragged him away to prison.

Thus these two children philosophized, trying to understand the mystery of the birth of Love. But they were only children; they did not really understand. Passion was sweeping them off their feet, because a common danger had bound them irrevocably to one another. The womanly instinct to save and to protect had given the young girl strength to bear a difficult part, and now she loved him for the dangers from which she had rescued him, and he loved her because she had risked her life for him.

The hours sped on; there was so much to say, so much that was exquisite to listen to. The shades of evening were gathering fast; the room, with its pale-toned hangings and faded tapestries, was sinking into the arms of gloom. Aunt Marie was no doubt too terrified to stir out of her kitchen; she did not bring the lamps, but the darkness suited Armand's mood, and Jeanne was glad that the gloaming effectually hid the perpetual blush in her cheeks.

In the evening air the dying flowers sent their heady fragrance around. Armand was intoxicated with the perfume of violets that clung to Jeanne's fingers, with the touch of her satin gown that brushed his cheek, with the murmur of her voice that quivered through her tears.

No noise from the ugly outer world reached this secluded spot. In the tiny square outside a street lamp had been lighted, and its feeble rays came peeping in through the lace curtains at the window. They caught the dainty silhouette of the young girl, playing with the loose tendrils of her hair around her forehead, and outlining with a thin band of light the contour of neck and shoulder, making the satin of her gown shimmer with an opalescent glow.

Armand rose from his knees. Her eyes were calling to him, her lips were ready to yield.

"Tu m'aimes?" he whispered.

And like a tired child she sank upon his breast.

He kissed her hair, her eyes, her lips; her skin was fragrant as the flowers of spring, the tears on her cheeks glistened like morning dew.

Aunt Marie came in at last, carrying the lamp. She found them sitting side by side, like two children, hand in hand, mute with the eloquence which comes from boundless love. They were under a spell, forgetting even that they lived, knowing nothing except that they loved.

The lamp broke the spell, and Aunt Marie's still trembling voice:

"Oh, my dear! how did you manage to rid yourself of those brutes?"

But she asked no other question, even when the lamp showed up quite clearly the glowing cheeks of Jeanne and the ardent eyes of Armand. In her heart, long since atrophied, there were a few memories, carefully put away in a secret cell, and those memories caused the old woman to understand.

Neither Jeanne nor Armand noticed what she did; the spell had been broken, but the dream lingered on; they did not see Aunt Marie putting the room tidy, and then quietly tiptoeing out by the door.

But through the dream, reality was struggling for recognition. After Armand had asked for the hundredth time: "Tu m'aimes?" and Jeanne for the hundredth time had replied mutely with her eyes, her fears for him suddenly returned.

Something had awakened her from her trance—a heavy footstep, mayhap, in the street below, the distant roll of a drum, or only the clash of steel saucepans in Aunt Marie's kitchen. But suddenly Jeanne was alert, and with her alertness came terror for the beloved.

"Your life," she said—for he had called her his life just then, "your life—and I was forgetting that it is still in danger . . . your dear, your precious life!"

"Doubly dear now," he replied, "since I owe it to you."

"Then I pray you, I entreat you, guard it well for my sake—make all haste to leave Paris . . . oh, this I beg of you!" she continued more earnestly, seeing a look of demur in his eyes; "every hour you spend in it brings danger nearer to your door."

"I could not leave Paris while you are here."

"But I am safe here," she urged; "quite, quite safe, I assure you. I am only a poor actress, and the Government takes no heed of us mimes. Men must be amused, even between the intervals of killing one another. Indeed, indeed, I should be far safer here now, waiting quietly for awhile, while you make preparations to go. . . . My hasty departure at this moment would bring disaster on us both."

There was logic in what she said. And yet how could he leave her? now that he had found this perfect woman—this realization of his highest ideals, how could he go and leave her in this awful Paris, with brutes like Héron forcing their hideous personality into her sacred presence, threatening that very life he would gladly give his own to keep inviolate?

"Listen, sweetheart," he said after a while, when presently reason struggled back for first place in his mind. "Will you allow me to consult with my chief, with the Scarlet Pimpernel, who is in Paris at the present moment? I am under his orders; I could not leave France just now. My life, my entire person are at his disposal. I and my comrades are here under his orders, for a great undertaking which he has not yet unfolded to us, but which I firmly believe is framed for the rescue of the Dauphin from the Temple."

She gave an involuntary exclamation of horror.

"No, no!" she said quickly and earnestly; "as far as you are concerned, Armand, that has now become an impossibility. Some one has betrayed you, and you are henceforth a marked man. I think that odious de Batz had a hand in Héron's visit of this afternoon. We succeeded in putting these spies off the scent, but only for a moment . . . within a few hours—less perhaps—Héron will repent him of his carelessness; he'll come back—I know that he will come back. He may leave me, personally, alone; but he will be on your track; he'll drag you to the Conciergerie to report yourself, and there your true name and history are bound to come to light. If you succeed in evading him, he will still be on your track. If the Scarlet Pimpernel keeps you in Paris now, your death will be at his door."

Her voice had become quite hard and trenchant as she said these last words; womanlike, she was already prepared to hate the man whose mysterious personality she had hitherto admired, now that the life and safety of Armand appeared to depend on the will of that elusive hero.

"You must not be afraid for me, Jeanne," he urged. "The Scarlet Pimpernel cares for all his followers; he would never allow me to run unnecessary risks."

She was unconvinced, almost jealous now of his enthusiasm for that unknown man. Already she had taken full possession of Armand; she had purchased his life, and he had given her his love. She would share neither treasure with that nameless leader who held Armand's allegiance.

"It is only for a little while, sweetheart," he reiterated again and again. "I could not, anyhow, leave Paris whilst I feel that you are here, maybe in danger.

The thought would be horrible. I should go mad if I had to leave you."

Then he talked again of England, of his life there, of the happiness and peace that were in store for them both.

"We will go to England together," he whispered, "and there we will be happy together, you and I. We will have a tiny house among the Kentish hills, and its walls will be covered with honeysuckle and roses. At the back of the house there will be an orchard, and in May, when the fruit-blossom is fading and soft spring breezes blow among the trees, showers of sweet-scented petals will envelop us as we walk along, falling on us like fragrant snow. You will come, sweetheart, will you not?"

"If you still wish it, Armand," she murmured.

Still wish it! He would gladly go to-morrow, if she would come with him. But, of course, that could not be arranged. She had her contract to fulfil at the theatre, then there would be her house and furniture to dispose of, and there was Aunt Marie. . . . But, of course, Aunt Marie would come too. . . . She thought that she could get away some time before the spring; and he swore that he could not leave Paris until she came with him.

It seemed a terrible deadlock, for she could not bear to think of him alone in those awful Paris streets, where she knew that spies would always be tracking him. She had no illusions as to the impression which she had made on Héron; she knew that it could only be a momentary one, and that Armand would henceforth be in daily, hourly danger.

At last she promised him that she would take the advice of his chief; they would both be guided by what he said. Armand would confide in him to-night, and if it could be arranged she would hurry on her preparations, and, mayhap, be ready to join him in a week.

"In the meanwhile, that cruel man must not risk your dear life," she said. "Remember, Armand, your life belongs to me. Oh, I could hate him for the love you bear him?"

"Sh—sh—sh!" he said earnestly. "Dear heart, you must not speak like that of the man whom, next to your perfect self, I love most upon earth."

"You think of him more than of me. I shall scarce live until I know that you are safely out of Paris."

Though it was horrible to part, yet it was best, perhaps, that he should go back to his lodgings now, in case Héron sent his spies back to her door, and since he meant to consult with his chief. She had a vague hope that if the mysterious hero was indeed the noble-hearted man whom Armand represented him to be, surely he would take compassion on the anxiety of a sorrowing woman, and release the man she loved from bondage.

This thought pleased her and gave her hope. She even urged Armand now to go.

"When may I see you to-morrow?" he asked.

"But it will be so dangerous to meet," she argued.

"I must see you. I could not live through the day without seeing you."

"The theatre is the safest place."

"I could not wait till the evening. May I not come here?"

"No, no. Héron's spies may be about."

"Where then?"

She thought it over for a moment.

'At the stage-door of the theatre at one o'clock," she said at last. "We shall have finished rehearsal.

Slip into the guichet of the concierge. I will tell him to admit you, and send my dresser to meet you there: she will bring you along to my room, where we shall be undisturbed for at least half an hour."

He had perforce to be content with that, though he would so much rather have seen her again here, where the faded tapestries and soft-toned hangings made such a perfect background for her delicate charm. He had every intention of confiding in Blakeney, and of asking his help for getting Jeanne out of Paris as quickly as may be.

Thus this perfect hour was past; the most pure, the fullest of joy that these two young people were ever destined to know. Perhaps they felt within themselves the consciousness that their great love would rise anon to yet greater, fuller perfection when Fate had crowned it with his halo of sorrow. Perhaps, too, it was that consciousness that gave to their kisses now the solemnity of a last farewell.

11

THE LEAGUE OF THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL

ARMAND never could say definitely afterwards whither he went when he left the Square du Roule that evening. No doubt he wandered about the streets for some time in an absent, mechanical way, paying no heed to the passers-by, none to the direction in which he was going.

His mind was full of Jeanne, her beauty, her courage, her attitude in face of the hideous bloodhound who had come to pollute that charming old-world boudoir by his loathsome presence. He recalled every word she uttered, every gesture she made.

He was a man in love for the first time—wholly, irremediably in love.

I suppose that it was the pangs of hunger that first recalled him to himself. It was close on eight o'clock now, and he had fed on his imaginings—first on anticipation, then on realization, and lastly on memory—during the best part of the day. Now he awoke from his day-dream to find himself tired and hungry, but fortunately not very far from that quarter of Paris where food is easily obtainable.

He was somewhere near the Madeleine—a quarter he knew well. Soon he saw in front of him a small eating-house which looked fairly clean and orderly. He pushed open its swing-door, and seeing an empty table in a secluded part of the room, he sat down and ordered some supper.

The place made no impression upon his memory. He could not have told you an hour later where it was situated, who had served him, what he had eaten, or what other persons were present in the dining-room at the time that he himself entered it.

Having eaten, however, he felt more like his normal self—more conscious of his actions. When he finally left the eating-house, he realized, for instance, that it was very cold—a fact of which he had for the past few hours been totally unaware. The snow was falling in thin close flakes, and a biting north-easterly wind was blowing those flakes into his face and down his collar. He wrapped his cloak tightly around him. It was a good step yet to Blakeney's lodgings, where he knew that he was expected.

He struck quickly into the Rue St. Honoré, avoiding the great open places where the grim horrors of this magnificent city in revolt against civilization were displayed in all their grim nakedness—on the

Place de la Révolution the guillotine, on the Carrousel the open-air camps of workers under the lash of slave-drivers more cruel than the uncivilized brutes of the Far West.

And Armand had to think of Jeanne in the midst of all these horrors. She was still a petted actress to-day, but who could tell if on the morrow the terrible law of the "suspect" would not reach her in order to drag her before a tribunal that knew no mercy, and whose sole justice was a condemnation?

The young man hurried on; he was anxious to be among his own comrades, to hear his chief's pleasant voice, to feel assured that by all the sacred laws of friendship Jeanne henceforth would become the special care of the Scarlet Pimpernel and his league.

Blakeney lodged in a small house situated on the Quai de l'Ecole, at the back of St. Germain l'Auxerrois, from whence he had a clear and uninterrupted view across the river, as far as the irregular block of buildings of the Châtelet Prison and the house of Justice.

The same tower-clock that two centuries ago had tolled the signal for the massacre of the Huguenots was even now striking nine. Armand slipped through the half-open *porte cochère*, crossed the narrow dark courtyard, and ran up two flights of winding stone stairs. At the top of these, a door on his right allowed a thin streak of light to filtrate between its two folds. An iron bell-handle hung beside it; Armand gave it a pull.

Two minutes later he was amongst his friends. He heaved a great sigh of content and relief. The very atmosphere here seemed to be different. As far as the lodging itself was concerned, it was as bare, as devoid of comfort as those sort of places—so-called *chambres garnies*—usually were in these days. The chairs looked rickety and uninviting, the sofa was of black horsehair, the carpet was threadbare, and in places in actual holes; but there was a certain something in the air which revealed, in the midst of all this squalor, the presence of a man of fastidious taste.

To begin with, the place was spotlessly clean; the stove, highly polished, gave forth a pleasing warm glow, even whilst the window, slightly open, allowed a modicum of fresh air to enter the room. In a rough earthenware jug on the table stood a large bunch of Christmas roses, and to the educated nostril the slight scent of perfumes that hovered in the air was doubly pleasing after the fetid air of the narrow streets.

Sir Andrew Ffoulkes was there, also my Lord Tony, and Lord Hastings. They greeted Armand with whole-hearted cheeriness.

"Where is Blakeney?" asked the young man as soon as he had shaken his friends by the hand.

"Present!" came in loud, pleasant accents from the door of an inner room on the right.

And there he stood under the lintel of the door, the man against whom was raised the giant hand of an entire nation—the man for whose head the revolutionary government of France would gladly pay out all the savings of its Treasury—the man whom human bloodhounds were tracking, hot on the scent—for whom the nets of a bitter revenge and relentless reprisals were constantly being spread.

Was he unconscious of it, or merely careless? His closest friend, Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, could not say. Certain it is that, as he now appeared before Armand, picturesque as ever in perfectly-tailored clothes, with priceless lace at throat and wrists, his slender fingers holding an enamelled snuff-box and a handkerchief of delicate cambric, his whole personality that of a dandy rather than a man of action, it seemed impossible to connect him with the foolhardy escapades which had set one nation glowing with enthusiasm and another clamouring for revenge.

But it was the magnetism that emanated from him that could not be denied; the light that now and then, swift as summer lightning, flashed out from the depths of the blue eyes usually veiled by heavy, lazy lids, the sudden tightening of firm lips, the setting of the square jaw, which in a moment—but only for the space of a second—transformed the entire face, and revealed the born leader of men.

Just now there was none of that in the *débonair*, easy-going man of the world who advanced to meet his friend. Armand went quickly up to him, glad to grasp his hand, slightly troubled with remorse, no doubt, at the recollection of his adventure of to-day. It almost seemed to him that from beneath his half-closed lids Blakeney had shot a quick inquiring glance upon him. The quick flash seemed to light up the young man's soul from within, and to reveal it, naked, to his friend.

It was all over in a moment, and Armand thought that mayhap his conscience had played him a trick: there was nothing apparent in him—of this he was sure—that could possibly divulge his secret just yet.

"I am rather late, I fear," he said. "I wandered about the streets in the late afternoon and lost my way in the dark. I hope I have not kept you all waiting."

They all pulled chairs closely round the fire, except Blakeney, who preferred to stand. He waited awhile until they were all comfortably settled, and all ready to listen, then:

"It is about the Dauphin," he said abruptly without farther preamble.

They understood. All of them had guessed it, almost before the summons came that had brought them to Paris two days ago. Sir Andrew Ffoulkes had left his young wife because of that, and Armand had demanded it as a right to join hands in this noble work. Blakeney had not left France for over three months now. Backwards and forwards between Paris, or Nantes, or Orléans to the coast, where his friends would meet him to receive those unfortunates whom one man's whole-hearted devotion had rescued from death; backwards and forwards into the very hearts of those cities wherein an army of sleuth-hounds was on his track, and the guillotine was stretching out her arms to catch the foolhardy adventurer.

Now it was about the Dauphin. They all waited, breathless and eager, the fire of a noble enthusiasm burning in their hearts. They waited in silence, their eyes fixed on the leader, lest one single word from him should fail to reach their ears.

The full magnetism of the man was apparent now. As he held these four men at this moment, he could have held a crowd. The man of the world—the fastidious dandy—had shed his mask; there stood the leader, calm, serene in the very face of the most deadly danger that had ever encompassed any man, looking that danger fully in the face, not striving to belittle it or to exaggerate it, but weighing it in the balance with what there was to accomplish; the rescue of a martyred, innocent child from the hands of fiends who were destroying his very soul even more completely than his body.

"Everything, I think, is prepared," resumed Sir Percy after a slight pause. "The Simons have been summarily dismissed; I learned that to-day. They remove from the Temple on Sunday next, the nineteenth. Obviously that is the one day most likely to help us in our operations. As far as I am concerned, I cannot make any hard-and-fast plans. Chance at the last moment will have to dictate. But from every one of you I must have co-operation, and it can only be by your following my directions implicitly that we can even remotely hope to succeed."

He crossed and recrossed the room once or twice before he spoke again, pausing now and again in his walk in front of a large map of Paris and its environs that hung upon the wall, his tall figure erect, his hands behind his back, his eyes fixed before him as if he saw right through the walls of this squalid room, and across the darkness that overhung the city, through the grim bastions of the mighty building far away, where the descendant of an hundred kings lived at the mercy of human fiends who worked for his abasement.

The man's face now was that of a seer and a visionary; the firm lines were set and rigid as those of an image carved in stone—the statue of heart-whole devotion, with the self-imposed task beckoning sternly to follow, there where lurked danger and death.

"The way, I think, in which we could best succeed would be this," he resumed after awhile, sitting now on the edge of the table and directly facing his four friends. The light from the lamp which stood upon the table behind him fell full upon those four glowing faces fixed eagerly upon him, but he himself was in shadow, a massive silhouette broadly cut out against the light-coloured map on the wall beyond.

"I remain here, of course, until Sunday," he said, "and will closely watch my opportunity, when I can with the greatest amount of safety enter the Temple building and take possession of the child. I shall, of course, choose the moment when the Simons are actually on the move, with their successors probably coming in at about the same time. God alone knows," he added earnestly, "how I shall contrive to get possession of the child; at the moment I am just as much in the dark about that as you are."

He paused a moment, and suddenly his grave face seemed flooded with sunshine, a kind of lazy merriment danced in his eyes, effacing all trace of solemnity within them.

"La!" he said lightly, "on one point I am not at all in the dark, and that is that His Majesty King Louis XVII. will come out of that ugly house in my company next Sunday, the nineteenth day of January in this year of grace seventeen hundred and ninety-four; and this, too, do I know—that those murderous blackguards shall not lay hands on me whilst that precious burden is in my keeping. So I pray you, my good Armand, do not look so glum," he added with his pleasant, merry laugh; "you'll need all your wits about you to help us in our undertaking."

"What do you wish me to do, Percy?" said the young man simply.

"In one moment I will tell you. I want you all to understand the situation first. The child will be out of the Temple on Sunday, but at what hour I know not. The later it will be the better would it suit my purpose, for I cannot get him out of Paris before evening with any chance of safety. Here we must risk nothing; the child is far better off as he is now than he would be if he were dragged back after an abortive attempt at rescue. But at this hour of the night, between nine and ten o'clock, I can arrange to get him out of Paris by the Villette gate, and that is where I want you, Ffoulkes, and you, Tony, to be, with some kind of covered cart, yourselves in any disguise your ingenuity will suggest. Here are a few certificates of safety; I have been making a collection of them for some time, as they are always useful."

He dived into the wide pocket of his coat and drew forth a number of cards, greasy, much-fingered documents of the usual pattern which the Committee of General Security delivered to the free citizens of the new republic, and without which no one could enter or leave any town or country commune without being detained as "suspect." He glanced at them and handed them over to Ffoulkes.

"Choose your own identity for the occasion, my good friend," he said lightly; "and you, too, Tony. You may be stonemasons or coal-carriers, chimney-sweeps or farm-labourers, I care not which so long as you look sufficiently grimy and wretched to be unrecognizable, and so long as you can procure a cart without arousing suspicions, and can wait for me punctually at the appointed spot."

Ffoulkes turned over the cards, and with a laugh handed them over to Lord Tony. The two fastidious gentlemen discussed for awhile the respective merits of a chimney-sweep's uniform as against that of a coal-carrier.

"You can carry more grime if you are a sweep," suggested Blakeney; "and if the soot gets into your eyes it does not make them smart like coal does."

"But soot adheres more closely," argued Tony solemnly, "and I know that we shan't get a bath for at least a week afterwards."

"Certainly you won't, you sybarite!" asserted Sir Percy with a laugh.

"After a week soot might become permanent," mused Sir Andrew, wondering what, under the circumstance, my lady would say to him.

"If you are both so fastidious," retorted Blakeney, shrugging his broad shoulders, "I'll turn one of you into a reddleman, and the other into a dyer. Then one of you will be bright scarlet to the end of his days, as the reddle never comes off the skin at all, and the other will have to soak in turpentine before the dye will consent to move. . . . In either case . . . oh, my dear Tony! . . . the smell . . ."

He laughed like a schoolboy in anticipation of a prank, and held his scented handkerchief to his nose. My Lord Hastings chuckled audibly, and Tony punched him for this unseemly display of mirth.

Armand watched the little scene in utter amazement. He had been in England over a year, and yet he could not understand these Englishmen. Surely they were the queerest, most inconsequent people in the world. Here were these men, who were engaged at this very moment in an enterprise which for cool-headed courage and foolhardy daring had probably no parallel in history. They were literally taking their lives in their hands, in all probability facing certain death; and yet they now sat chaffing and fighting like a crowd of third-form school-boys, talking utter, silly nonsense, and making foolish jokes that would have shamed a Frenchman in his teens. Vaguely he wondered what fat, pompous de Batz would think of this discussion if he could overhear it. His contempt, no doubt, for the Scarlet Pimpernel and his followers would be increased tenfold.

Then at last the question of the disguise was effectually dismissed. Sir Andrew Ffoulkes and Lord Antony Dewhurst had settled their differences of opinion by solemnly agreeing to represent two over-grimy and overheated coal-heavers. They chose two certificates of safety that were made out in the names of Jean Lepetit and Achille Grospierre, labourers.

"Though you don't look at all like an Achille, Tony," was Blakeney's parting shot to his friend.

Then without any transition from this schoolboy nonsense to the serious business of the moment, Sir Andrew Ffoulkes said abruptly:

"Tell us exactly, Blakeney, where you will want the cart to stand on Sunday."

Blakeney rose and turned to the map against the wall, Ffoulkes and Tony following him. They stood close to his elbow whilst his slender, nervy hand wandered along the shiny surface of the varnished paper. At last he placed his finger on one spot.

"Here, you see," he said, "is the Villette gate. Just outside it a narrow street on the right leads down in the direction of the canal. It is just at the bottom of that narrow street at its junction with the tow-path there that I want you two and the cart to be. It had better be a coal-cart, by the way; they will be unloading coal close by there to-morrow," he added with one of his sudden irrepressible outbursts of merriment. "You and Tony can exercise your muscles coal-heaving, and incidentally make yourselves known in the neighbourhood as good if somewhat grimy patriots."

"We had better take up our parts at once then," said Tony. "I'll take a fond farewell of my clean shirt to-night."

"Yes, you will not see one again for some time, my good Tony. After your hard day's work to-morrow you will have to sleep either inside your cart, if you have already secured one, or under the arches of the canal bridge, if you have not."

"I hope you have an equally pleasant prospect for Hastings," was my Lord Tony's grim comment.

It was easy to see that he was as happy as a schoolboy about to start for a holiday. Lord Tony was a true sportsman. Perhaps there was in him less sentiment for the heroic work which he did under the guidance of his chief than an inherent passion for dangerous adventures. Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, on the other hand, thought perhaps a little less of the adventure, but a great deal of the martyred child in the Temple. He was just as buoyant, just as keen as his friend, but the leaven of sentiment raised his sporting instincts to perhaps a higher plane of self-devotion.

"Well, now, to recapitulate," he said, in turn following with his finger the indicated route on the map. "Tony and I and the coal-cart will await you on this spot, at the corner of the tow-path on Sunday evening at nine o'clock."

"And your signal, Blakeney?" asked Tony.

"The usual one," replied Sir Percy, "the sea-mew's cry, thrice repeated at brief intervals. But now," he continued, turning to Armand and Hastings, who had taken no part in the discussion hitherto, "I want your help a little further afield."

"I thought so," nodded Hastings.

"The coal-cart, with its usual miserable nag, will carry us a distance of fifteen or sixteen kilometres, but no more. My purpose is to cut along the north of the city, and to reach St. Germain, the nearest point where we can secure good mounts. There is a farmer just outside the commune; his name is Achard. He has excellent horses, which I have borrowed before now; we shall want five, of course, and he has one powerful beast that will do for me, as I shall have, in addition to my own weight, which is considerable, to take the child with me on the pillion. Now you, Hastings and Armand, will have to start early to-morrow morning, leave Paris by the Neuilly gate, and from there make your way to St. Germain by any conveyance you can contrive to obtain. At St. Germain you must at once find Achard's farm; disguised as labourers you will not arouse suspicion by so doing. You will find the farmer quite amenable to money, and you must secure the best horses you can get for our own use, and, if possible, the powerful mount I spoke of just now. You are both excellent horsemen, therefore I selected you amongst the others for this special errand, for you two, with the five horses, will have to come and meet our coal-cart some seventeen kilometres out of St. Germain, to where the first signpost indicates the road to Courbevoie. Some two hundred metres down this road on the right there is a small spinney, which will afford splendid shelter for yourselves and your horses. We hope to be there at about one o'clock after midnight of Monday morning. Now, is all that quite clear, and are you both satisfied?"

"It is quite clear," exclaimed Hastings placidly; "but I, for one, am not at all satisfied."

"And why not?"

"Because it is all too easy. We get none of the danger."

"Oho! I thought that you would bring that argument forward, you incorrigible grumbler," laughed Sir Percy, good-humouredly. "Let me tell you that if you start to-morrow from Paris in that spirit you will run your head and Armand's into a noose long before you reach the gate of Neuilly. I cannot allow either of you to cover your faces with too much grime; an honest farm labourer should not look over-dirty, and your chances of being discovered and detained are, at the outset, far greater than those which Ffoulkes and Tony will run——"

Armand had said nothing during this time. While Blakeney was unfolding his plan for him and for Lord Hastings—a plan which practically was a command—he had sat with his arms folded across his chest, his head sunk upon his breast. When Blakeney had asked if they were satisfied, he had taken no part in Hastings' protest nor responded to his leader's good-humoured banter.

Though he did not look up even now, yet he felt that Percy's eyes were fixed upon him, and they seemed to scorch into his soul. He made a great effort to appear eager like the others, and yet from the first chill had struck at his heart. He could not leave Paris before he had seen Jeanne.

He looked up suddenly, trying to seem unconcerned; he even looked his chief fully in the face.

"When ought we to leave Paris?" he asked calmly.

"You MUST leave at daybreak," replied Blakeney with a slight, almost imperceptible emphasis on the word of command. "When the gates are first opened, and the work-people go to and fro at their work, that is the safest hour. And you must be at St. Germain as soon as may be, or the farmer may not have a sufficiency of horses available at a moment's notice. I want you to be spokesman with Achard, so that Hastings' British accent should not betray you both. Also you might not get a conveyance for St. Germain immediately. We must think of every eventuality, Armand. There is so much at stake."

Armand made no further comment just then. But the others looked astonished. Armand had but asked a simple question, and Blakeney's reply seemed almost like a rebuke—so circumstantial, too, and so explanatory. He was so used to being obeyed at a word, so accustomed that the merest wish, the slightest hint from him was understood by his band of devoted followers, that the long explanation of his orders which he gave to Armand struck them all with a strange sense of unpleasant surprise.

Hastings was the first to break the spell that seemed to have fallen over the party.

"We leave at daybreak, of course," he said, "as soon as the gates are open. We can, I know, get one of the carriers to give us a lift as far as St. Germain. There, how do we find Achard?"

"He is a well-known farmer," replied Blakeney. "You have but to ask."

"Good. Then we bespeak five horses for the next day, find lodgings in the village that night, and make a fresh start back towards Paris in the evening of Sunday. Is that right?"

"Yes. One of you will have two horses on the lead, the other one. Pack some fodder on the empty saddles and start at about ten o'clock. Ride straight along the main road, as if you were making back for Paris, until you come to four cross-roads with a sign-post pointing to Courbevoie. Turn down there and go along the road until you meet a close spinney of fir-trees on your right. Make for the interior of that. It gives splendid shelter and you can dismount there and give the horses a feed. We'll join you one hour after midnight. The night will be dark, I hope, and the moon, anyhow, will be on the wane."

"I think I understand. Anyhow, it's not difficult, and we'll be as careful as maybe."

"You will have to keep your heads clear, both of you," concluded Blakeney.

He was looking at Armand as he said this; but the young man had not made a movement during this brief colloquy between Hastings and the chief. He still sat with arms folded, his head falling on his breast.

Silence had fallen on them all. They all sat round the fire buried in thought. Through the open window there came from the quay the hum of life in the open-air camp; the tramp of the sentinels around it, the words of command from the drill-sergeant, and through it all the moaning of the wind and the beating of the sleet against the window-panes.

A whole world of wretchedness was expressed by those sounds! Blakeney gave a quick, impatient sigh, and going to the window he pushed it further open, and just then there came from afar the muffled roll of drums, and from below the watchman's cry that seemed such dire mockery:

"Sleep, citizens! Everything is safe and peaceful."

"Sound advice," said Blakeney lightly. "Shall we also go to sleep? What say you all—eh?"

He had, with that sudden rapidity characteristic of his every action, already thrown off the serious air which he had worn a moment ago when giving instructions to Hastings. His usual *débonair* manner was on him once again, his laziness, his careless *insouciance.* He was even at this moment deeply engaged in flicking off a grain of dust from the immaculate Mechlin cuff at his wrist. The heavy lids had fallen over the tell-tale eyes as if weighted with fatigue, the mouth appeared ready for the laugh which never was absent from it very long.

It was only Ffoulkes's devoted eyes that were sharp enough to pierce the mask of light-hearted gaiety which enveloped the soul of his leader at the present moment. He saw—for the first time in all the years that he had known Blakeney—a frown across the habitually smooth brow, and though the lips were parted for a laugh, the lines round mouth and chin were hard and set.

With that intuition born of whole-hearted friendship Sir Andrew guessed what troubled Percy. He had caught the look which the latter had thrown on Armand, and knew that some explanation would have to pass between the two men before they parted to-night. Therefore he gave the signal for the breaking up of the meeting.

"There is nothing more to say, is there, Blakeney?" he asked.

"No, my good fellow, nothing," replied Sir Percy. "I do not know how you all feel, but I am demmed fatigued."

"What about the rags for to-morrow?" queried Hastings.

"You know where to find them. In the room below. Ffoulkes has the key. Wigs and all are there. But don't use false hair if you can help it —it is apt to shift in a scrimmage."

He spoke jerkily, more curtly than was his wont. Hastings and Tony thought that he was tired. They rose to say good-night. Then the three men went away together, Armand remaining behind.

12

WHAT LOVE IS

"WELL, now, Armand, what is it?" asked Blakeney, the moment the footsteps of his friends had died away down the stone stairs, and their voices had ceased to echo in the distance.

"You guessed, then, that there was . . . something?" said the younger man, after a slight hesitation.

"Of course."

Armand rose, pushing the chair away from him with an impatient, nervy gesture. Burying his hands in the pockets of his breeches, he began striding up and down the room, a dark, troubled expression in his face, a deep frown between his eyes.

Blakeney had once more taken up his favourite position, sitting on the corner of the table, his broad shoulders interposed between the lamp and the rest of the room. He was apparently taking no notice of Armand, but only intent on the delicate operation of polishing his nails.

Suddenly the young man paused in his restless walk and stood in front of his friend—an earnest, solemn, determined figure.

"Blakeney," he said, "I cannot leave Paris to-morrow."

Sir Percy made no reply. He was contemplating the polish which he had just succeeded in producing on his thumbnail.

"I must stay here for a while longer," continued Armand firmly. "I may not be able to return to England for some weeks. You have the three others here to help you in your enterprise outside Paris. I am entirely at your service within the compass of its walls."

Still no comment from Blakeney, not a look from beneath the fallen lids. Armand continued, with a slight tone of impatience apparent in his voice:

"You must want some one to help you here on Sunday. . . . I am entirely at your service . . . here or anywhere in Paris . . . but I cannot leave this city . . . at any rate, not just yet. . . ."

Blakeney was apparently satisfied at last with the result of his polishing operations. He rose, gave a slight yawn, and turned toward the door.

"Good night, my dear fellow," he said pleasantly; "it is time we were all abed. I am so demmed fatigued."

"Percy!" exclaimed the young man hotly.

"Eh? What is it?" queried the other lazily.

"You are not going to leave me like this—without a word?"

"I have said a great many words, my good fellow. I have said 'good night,' and remarked that I was demmed fatigued."

He was standing beside the door which led to his bedroom, and now he pushed it open with his hand.

"Percy, you cannot go and leave me like this!" reiterated Armand with rapidly growing irritation.

"Like what, my dear fellow?" queried Sir Percy with good-humoured impatience.

"Without a word—without a sign. What have I done that you should treat me like a child, unworthy even of attention?"

Blakeney had turned back and was now facing him, towering above the slight figure of the younger man. His face had lost none of its gracious air, and beneath their heavy lids his eyes looked down not unkindly on his friend.

"Would you have preferred it, Armand," he said quietly, "if I had said the word that your ears have heard even though my lips have not uttered it?"

"I don't understand," murmured Armand defiantly.

"What sign would you have had me make?" continued Sir Percy, his pleasant voice falling calm and mellow on the younger man's supersensitive consciousness: "That of branding you, Marguerite's brother, as a liar and a cheat?"

"Blakeney!" retorted the other, as with flaming cheeks and wrathful eyes he took a menacing step toward his friend; "had any man but you dared to speak such words to me——"

"I pray to God, Armand, that no man but I has the right to speak them."

"You have no right."

"Every right, my friend. Do I not hold your oath? . . . Are you not prepared to break it?"

"I'll not break my oath to you. I'll serve and help you in every way you can command . . . my life I'll give to the cause . . . give me the most dangerous—the most difficult task to perform . . . I'll do it—I'll do it gladly."

"I have given you an over-difficult and dangerous task."

"Bah! To leave Paris in order to engage horses, while you and the others do all the work. That is neither difficult nor dangerous."

"It will be difficult for you, Armand, because your head is not sufficiently cool to foresee serious eventualities and to prepare against them. It is dangerous, because you are a man in love, and a man in love is apt to run his head—and that of his friends—blindly into a noose."

"Who told you that I was in love?"

"You yourself, my good fellow. Had you not told me so at the outset," he continued, still speaking very quietly and deliberately and never raising his voice, "I would even now be standing over you, dog-whip in hand, to thrash you as a defaulting coward and a perjurer. . . . Bah!" he added with a return to his habitual *bonhomie*, "I would no doubt even have lost my temper with you. Which would have been purposeless and excessively bad form. Eh?"

A violent retort had sprung to Armand's lips. But fortunately at that very moment his eyes, glowing with anger, caught those of Blakeney fixed with lazy good-nature upon his. Something of that irresistible dignity which pervaded the whole personality of the man checked Armand's hot-headed words on his lips.

"I cannot leave Paris to-morrow," he reiterated more calmly.

"Because you have arranged to see her again?"

"Because she saved my life to-day, and is herself in danger."

"She is in no danger," said Blakeney simply, "since she saved the life of my friend."

"Percy!"

The cry was wrung from Armand St. Just's very soul. Despite the tumult of passion which was raging in his heart, he was conscious again of the magnetic power which bound so many to this man's service. The words he had said—simple though they were—had sent a thrill through Armand's veins. He felt himself disarmed. His resistence fell before the subtle strength of an unbendable will; nothing remained in his heart but an overwhelming sense of shame and of impotence.

He sank into a chair and rested his elbows on the table burying his face in his hands. Blakeney went up to him and placed a kindly hand upon his shoulder.

"The difficult task, Armand," he said gently.

"Percy, cannot you release me? She saved my life. I have not thanked her yet."

"There will be time for thanks later, Armand. Just now over yonder the son of kings is being done to death by savage brutes."

"I would not hinder you if I stayed."

"God knows you have hindered us enough already."

"How?"

"You say she saved your life . . . then you were in danger. . . . Héron and his spies have been on your track . . . your track leads to mine, and I have sworn to save the Dauphin from the hands of thieves. . . . A man in love, Armand, is a deadly danger among us. . . . Therefore at daybreak you must leave Paris with Hastings on your difficult and dangerous task."

"And if I refuse?" retorted Armand.

"My good fellow," said Blakeney earnestly, "in that admirable lexicon which the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel has compiled for itself there is no such word as 'refuse'."

"But if I do refuse?" persisted the other.

"You would be offering a tainted name and tarnished honour to the woman you pretend to love."

"And you insist upon my obedience?"

"By the oath which I hold from you."

"But this is cruel—inhuman!"

"Honour, my good Armand, is often cruel and seldom human. He is a godlike taskmaster, and we who call ourselves men are all of us his slaves."

"The tyranny comes from you alone. You could release me an you would."

"And to gratify the selfish desire of immature passion you would wish to see me jeopardize the life of those who place infinite trust in me."

"God knows how you have gained their allegiance, Blakeney. To me now you are selfish and callous."

"There is the difficult task you craved for, Armand," was all the answer that Blakeney made to the taunt—"to obey a leader whom you no longer trust."

But this Armand could not brook. He had spoken hotly, impetuously, smarting under the discipline which thwarted his desire, but his heart was loyal to the chief whom he had reverenced for so long.

"Forgive me, Percy," he said humbly; "I am distracted. I don't think I quite realized what I was saying. I trust you, of course . . . implicitly . . . and you need not even fear . . . I shall not break my oath, though your orders now seem to me needlessly callous and selfish. . . . I will obey . . . you need not be afraid."

"I was not afraid of that, my good fellow."

"Of course, you do not understand . . . you cannot. . . . To you, your honour, the task which you have set yourself, has been your only fetish. . . . Love in its true sense does not exist for you. . . . I see it now . . . you do not know what it is to love."

Blakeney made no reply for the moment. He stood in the centre of the room, with the yellow light of the lamp falling full now upon his tall powerful frame, immaculately dressed in perfectly-tailored clothes upon his long, slender hands half hidden by filmy lace, and upon his face, across which at this moment a heavy strand of curly hair threw a curious shadow. At Armand's words his lips had imperceptibly tightened, his eyes had narrowed as if they tried to see something that was beyond the range of their focus.

Across the smooth brow the strange shadow made by the hair seemed to find a reflex from within. Perhaps the reckless adventurer, the careless gambler with life and liberty, saw through the walls of this squalid room, across the wide, ice-bound river, and beyond even the gloomy pile of buildings opposite, the vision of a cool, shady garden at Richmond, a velvety lawn sweeping down to the river's edge, a bower of clematis and roses, with a carved stone seat half covered with moss. There sat an exquisitely beautiful woman with great sad eyes fixed on the far-distant horizon. The setting sun was throwing a halo of gold all round her hair, her white hands were clasped idly on her lap.

She gazed out beyond the river, beyond the sunset, toward an unseen bourne of peace and happiness, and her lovely face had in it a look of utter hopelessness and of sublime self-abnegation. The air was still. It was late autumn, and all around her the russet leaves of beech and chestnut fell with a melancholy hush-sh-sh about her feet.

She was alone, and from time to time heavy tears gathered in her eyes and rolled slowly down her cheeks.

Suddenly a sigh escaped the man's tightly-pressed lips. With a strange gesture, wholly unusual to him, he passed his hand right across his eyes.

"Mayhap you are right, Armand," he said quietly; "mayhap I do not know what it is to love."

Armand turned to go. There was nothing more to be said. He knew Percy well enough by now to realize the finality of his pronouncements. His heart felt sore, but he was too proud to show his hurt again to a man who did not understand. All thoughts of disobedience he had put resolutely aside; he had never meant to break his oath. All that he had hoped to do was to persuade Percy to release him from it for awhile.

That by leaving Paris he risked to lose Jeanne he was quite convinced, but it is nevertheless a true fact that in spite of this he did not withdraw his love and trust from his chief. He was under the influence of that same magnetism which enchained all his comrades to the will of this man; and though his enthusiasm for the great cause had somewhat waned, his allegiance to its leader was no longer tottering.

But he would not trust himself to speak again on the subject.

"I will find the others downstairs," was all he said, "and will arrange with Hastings for to-morrow. Good night, Percy."

"Good night, my dear fellow. By the way, you have not told me yet who she is."

"Her name is Jeanne Lange," said St. Just half reluctantly. He had not meant to divulge his secret quite so fully as yet.

"The young actress at the Théâtre National?"

"Yes. Do you know her?"

"Only by name."

"She is beautiful, Percy, and she is an angel. . . . Think of my sister Marguerite . . . she, too, was an actress. . . . Good night, Percy."

"Good night."

The two men grasped one another by the hand. Armand's eyes proffered a last desperate appeal. But Blakeney's eyes were impassive and unrelenting, and Armand with a quick sigh finally took his leave.

For a long while after he had gone Blakeney stood silent and motionless in the middle of the room. Armand's last words lingered in his ear:

"Think of Marguerite."

The walls had fallen away from around him—the window, the river below, the Temple Prison had all faded away, merged in the chaos of his thoughts.

Now he was no longer in Paris; he heard nothing of the horrors that even at this hour of the night were raging around him; he did not hear the call of murdered victims, of innocent women and children crying for help; he did not see the descendant of St. Louis, with a red cap on his baby head, stamping on the *fleur-de-lys*, and heaping insults on the memory of his mother. All that had faded into nothingness.

He was in the garden at Richmond, and Marguerite was sitting on the stone seat, with branches of the rambler roses twining themselves in her hair.

He was sitting on the ground at her feet, his head pillowed in her lap, lazily dreaming, whilst at his feet the river wound its graceful curves beneath overhanging willows and tall stately elms.

A swan came sailing majestically down the stream, and Marguerite, with idle, delicate hands, threw some crumbs of bread into the water. Then she laughed, for she was quite happy, and anon she stooped, and he felt the fragrance of her lips as she bent over him and savoured the perfect sweetness of her caress. She was happy because her husband was by her side. He had done with adventures, with risking his life for others' sake. He was living only for her.

The man, the dreamer, the idealist that lurked behind the adventurous soul, lived an exquisite dream as he gazed upon that vision. He closed his eyes so that it might last all the longer, so that through the open window opposite he should not see the great gloomy walls of the labyrinthine building packed to overflowing with innocent men, women and children, waiting patiently and with a smile on their lips for a cruel and unmerited death; so that he should not see even through the vista of houses and of streets that grim Temple Prison far away, and the light in one of the tower windows, which illumined the final martyrdom of a boy king.

Thus he stood for fully five minutes, with eyes deliberately closed and lips tightly set. Then the neighbouring tower-clock of St. Germain l'Auxerrois slowly tolled the hour of the night. Blakeney woke from his dream. The walls of his lodgings were once more around him, and through the window the ruddy light of some torch in the street below fought with that of the lamp.

He went deliberately up to the window and looked out into the night. On the quay, a little to the left, the outdoor camp was just breaking up for the night. The people of France in arms against tyranny were allowed to put away their work for the day and to go to their miserable homes to gather rest in sleep for the morrow. A band of soldiers, rough and brutal in their movements, were hustling the women and children. The little ones, weary, sleepy, and cold, seemed too dazed to move. One woman had two little children clinging to her skirts; a soldier suddenly seized one of them by the shoulders and pushed it along roughly in front of him to get it out of the way. The woman struck at the soldier in a stupid, senseless, useless way, and then gathered her trembling chicks under her wing, trying to look defiant.

In a moment she was surrounded. Two soldiers seized her, and two more dragged the children away from her. She screamed and the children cried, the soldiers swore and struck out right and left with their bayonets. There was a general *mêlée*, calls of agony rent the air, rough oaths drowned the shouts of the helpless. Some women, panic-stricken, started to run.

And Blakeney from his window looked down upon the scene. He no longer saw the garden at Richmond, the lazily-flowing river, the bowers of roses; even the sweet face of Marguerite, sad and lonely, appeared dim and far away.

He looked across the ice-bound river, past the quay where rough soldiers were brutalizing a number of wretched defenceless women, to that grim Châtelet Prison, where tiny lights shining here and there behind barred windows told the sad tale of weary vigils, of watches through the night, when dawn would bring martyrdom and death.

And it was not Marguerite's blue eyes that beckoned to him now, it was not her lips that called, but the wan face of a child with matted curls hanging above a greasy forehead, and small hands covered in grime that had once been fondled by a Queen.

The adventurer in him had chased away the dream.

"While there is life in me I'll cheat those brutes of prey," he murmured.

13

THEN EVERYTHING WAS DARK

The night that Armand St. Just spent tossing about on a hard, narrow bed was the most miserable, agonizing one he had ever passed in his life. A kind of fever ran through him, causing his teeth to chatter and the veins in his temples to throb until he thought that they must burst.

Physically he certainly was ill; the mental strain caused by two great conflicting passions had attacked his bodily strength, and whilst his brain and heart fought their battles together his aching limbs found no repose.

His love for Jeanne! His loyalty to the man to whom he owed his life, and to whom he had sworn allegiance and implicit obedience!

These super-acute feelings seemed to be tearing at his very heart-strings, until he felt that he could no longer lie on the miserable palliasse which in these squalid lodgings did duty for a bed.

He rose long before daybreak, with tired back and burning eyes, but unconscious of any pain save that which tore at his heart.

The weather, fortunately, was not quite so cold—a sudden and very rapid thaw had set in; and when after a hurried toilet Armand, carrying a bundle under his arm, emerged into the street, the mild south wind struck him pleasantly on his face.

It was then pitch dark. The street lamps had been extinguished long ago, and the feeble January sun had not yet tinged with pale colour the heavy clouds that hung over the sky.

The streets of the great city were absolutely deserted at this hour. It lay, peaceful and still, wrapped in its mantle of gloom. A thin rain was falling, and Armand's feet, as he began to descend the heights of Montmartre, sank ankle deep in the mud of the road. There was but scanty attempt at pavements in this outlying quarter of the town, and Armand had much ado to keep his footing on the uneven and intermittent stones that did duty for roads in these parts. But this discomfort did not trouble him just now. One thought—and one alone—was clear in his mind: he must see Jeanne before he left Paris.

He did not pause to think how he could accomplish that at this hour of the day. All he knew was that he must obey his chief, and that he must see Jeanne. He would see her, explain to her that he must leave Paris immediately, and beg her to make her preparations quickly, so that she might meet him as soon as maybe, and accompany him to England straight away.

He did not feel that he was being disloyal by trying to see Jeanne. He had thrown prudence to the winds, not realizing that his imprudence would and did jeopardize not only the success of his chief's plans, but also his life and that of his friends. He had before parting from Hastings last night arranged to meet him in the neighbourhood of the Neuilly Gate at seven o'clock; it was only six now. There was plenty of time for him to rouse the concierge at the house of the Square du Roule, to see Jeanne for a few moments, to slip into Madame Belhomme's kitchen, and there into the labourer's clothes which he was carrying in the bundle under his arm, and to be at the gate at the appointed hour.

The Square du Roule is shut off from the Rue St. Honoré, on which it abuts, by tall iron gates, which a few years ago, when the secluded little square was a fashionable quarter of the city, used to be kept closed at night, with a watchman in uniform to intercept midnight prowlers. Now these gates had been rudely torn away from their sockets, the iron had been sold for the benefit of the ever-empty Treasury, and no one cared if the homeless, the starving, or the evil-doer found shelter under the porticoes of the houses, from whence wealthy or aristocratic owners had long since thought it wise to flee.

No one challenged Armand when he turned into the square, and though the darkness was intense, he made his way fairly straight for the house where lodged Mademoiselle Lange.

So far he had been wonderfully lucky. The foolhardiness with which he had exposed his life and that of his friends by wandering about the streets of Paris at this hour without any attempt at disguise, though carrying one under his arm, had not met with the untoward fate which it undoubtedly deserved. The darkness of the night and the thin sheet of rain as it fell had effectually wrapped his progress through the lonely streets in their beneficent mantle of gloom; the soft mud below had drowned the echo of his footsteps. If spies were on his track, as Jeanne had feared and Blakeney prophesied, he had certainly succeeded in evading them.

He pulled the concierge's bell, and the latch of the outer door, manipulated from within, duly sprang open in response. He entered, and from the lodge the concierge's voice emerging, muffled from the depths of pillows and blankets, challenged him with an oath at the unseemliness of the hour.

"Mademoiselle Lange," said Armand boldly, as without hesitation he walked quickly past the lodge, making straight for the stairs.

It seemed to him that from the concierge's room loud vituperations followed him, but he took no notice of these; only a short flight of stairs and one more door separated him from Jeanne.

He did not pause to think that she would in all probability be still in bed, that he might have some difficulty in rousing Madame Belhomme, that the latter might not even care to admit him; nor did he reflect on the glaring imprudence of his actions. He wanted to see Jeanne, and she was the other side of that wall.

"Hé, citizen! Holà! Here! Curse you! Where are you?" came in a gruff voice to him from below.

He had mounted the stairs, and was now on the landing just outside Jeanne's door. He pulled the bell-handle, and heard the pleasing echo of the bell that would presently wake Madame Belhomme and bring her to the door.

"Citizen! Holà! Curse you for an aristo! What are you doing there?"

The concierge, a stout, elderly man, wrapped in a blanket, his feet thrust in slippers, and carrying a guttering yellow candle, had appeared upon the landing. He held the candle up so that its feeble rays fell on Armand's pale face, and on the damp cloak which fell away from his shoulders.

"What are you doing there?" reiterated the concierge with another oath from his prolific vocabulary.

"As you see, citizen," replied Armand politely, "I am ringing Mademoiselle Lange's front-door bell."

"At this hour of the morning?" queried the man with a sneer.

"I desire to see her."

"Then you have come to the wrong house, citizen," said the concierge with a rude laugh.

"The wrong house? What do you mean?" stammered Armand, a little bewildered.

"She is not here—quoi!" retorted the concierge, who now turned deliberately on his heel. "Go and look for her, citizen; it'll take you some time to find her."

He shuffled off in the direction of the stairs. Armand was vainly trying to shake himself free from a sudden, an awful sense of horror.

He gave another vigorous pull at the bell, then with one bound he overtook the concierge, who was preparing to descend the stairs, and gripped him peremptorily by the arm.

"Where is Mademoiselle Lange?" he asked.

His voice sounded quite strange in his own ear; his throat felt parched, and he had to moisten his lips with his tongue before he was able to speak.

"Arrested," replied the man.

"Arrested? When? Where? How?"

"When—late yesterday evening. Where?—here in her room. How?—by the agents of the Committee of General Security. She and the old woman! Basta! that's all I know. Now I am going back to bed, and you clear out of the house. You are making a disturbance, and I shall be reprimanded. I ask you, is this a decent time for rousing honest patriots out of their morning sleep?"

He shook his arm free from Armand's grasp and once more began to descend.

Armand stood on the landing like a man who has been stunned by a blow on the head. His limbs were paralysed. He could not for the moment have moved or spoken if his life had depended on a sign or on a word. His brain was reeling, and he had to steady himself with his hand against the wall or he would have fallen headlong on the floor. He had lived in a whirl of excitement for the past twenty-four hours; his nerves during that time had been kept at straining point. Passion, joy, happiness, deadly danger, and moral fights had worn his mental endurance threadbare; want of proper food and a sleepless night had almost thrown his physical balance out of gear. This blow came at a moment when he was least able to bear it.

Jeanne had been arrested! Jeanne was in the hands of those brutes whom he, Armand, had regarded yesterday with insurmountable loathing! Jeanne was in prison—she was arrested—she would be tried, condemned, and all because of him.

The thought was so awful that it brought him to the verge of mania. He watched as in a dream the form of the concierge shuffling his way down the oak staircase; his portly figure assumed Gargantuan proportions, the candle which he carried looked like the dancing flames of hell, through which grinning faces, hideous and contortioned, mocked at him and leered.

Then suddenly everything was dark. The light had disappeared round the bend of the stairs; grinning faces and ghoulish visions vanished: he only saw Jeanne, his dainty, exquisite Jeanne, in the hands of those brutes. He saw her as he had seen a year and a half ago the victims of those bloodthirsty wretches being dragged before a tribunal that was but a mockery of justice; he heard the quick interrogatory, and the responses from her perfect lips, that exquisite voice of hers veiled by tones of anguish. He heard the condemnation, the rattle of the tumbril on the ill-paved streets—saw her there with hands clasped together, her eyes——

Great God! he was really going mad!

Like a wild creature driven forth he started to run down the stairs, past the concierge, who was just entering his lodge, and who now turned in surly anger to watch this man running away like a lunatic or a fool, out by the front door and into the street. In a moment he was out of the little square; then like a hunted hare he still ran down the Rue St. Honoré, along its narrow, interminable length. His hat had fallen from his head, his hair was wild all round his face, the rain weighted the cloak upon his shoulders; but still he ran.

His feet made no noise on the muddy pavement. He ran on and on, his elbows pressed to his sides, panting, quivering, intent but upon one thing—the goal which he had set himself to reach.

Jeanne was arrested. He did not know where to look for her, but he did know whither he wanted to go now as swiftly as his legs would carry him.

It was still dark, but Armand St. Just was a born

Parisian, and he knew every inch of this quarter, where he and Marguerite had lived years ago. Down the Rue St. Honoré—he had reached the bottom of the interminably long street at last. He had kept just a sufficiency of reason—or was it merely blind instinct?—to avoid the places where the night patrols of the National Guard might be on the watch. He avoided the Place du Carrousel, also the quay, and struck sharply to his right until he reached the façade of St. Germain l'Auxerrois.

Another effort; round the corner, and there was the house at last. He was like the hunted creature now that has run to earth. Up the two flights of stone stairs, and then the pull at the bell; a moment of tense anxiety, whilst panting, gasping, almost choked with the sustained effort and the strain of the past half-hour, he leaned against the wall, striving not to fall.

Then the well-known firm step across the rooms beyond, the open door, the hand upon his shoulder.

After that he remembered nothing more.

14

THE CHIEF

He had not actually fainted, but the exertion of that long run had rendered him partially unconscious. He knew now that he was safe, that he was sitting in Blakeney's room, and that something hot and vivifying was being poured down his throat.

"Percy, they have arrested her!" he said, panting, as soon as speech returned to his paralysed tongue.

"All right. Don't talk now. Wait till you are better."

With infinite care and gentleness Blakeney arranged some cushions under Armand's head, turned the sofa towards the fire, and anon brought his friend a cup of hot coffee, which the latter drank with avidity.

He was really too exhausted to speak. He had contrived to tell Blakeney, and now Blakeney knew, so everything would be all right. The inevitable reaction was asserting itself; the muscles had relaxed, the nerves were numbed, and Armand lay back on the sofa with eyes half closed, unable to move, yet feeling his strength gradually returning to him, his vitality asserting itself, all the feverish excitement of the past twenty-four hours yielding at last to a calmer mood.

Through his half-closed eyes he could see his brother-in-law moving about the room. Blakeney was fully dressed. In a sleepy kind of way Armand wondered if he had been to bed at all; certainly his clothes sat on him with their usual well-tailored perfection, and there was no suggestion in his brisk step and alert movements that he had passed a sleepless night.

Now he was standing by the open window. Armand, from where he lay, could see his broad shoulders sharply outlined against the grey background of the hazy winter dawn. A wan light was just creeping up from the east over the city; the noises of the streets below came distinctly to Armand's ear.

He roused himself with one vigorous effort from his lethargy, feeling quite ashamed of himself and of this breakdown of his nervous system. He looked with frank admiration on Sir Percy, who stood immovable and silent by the window—a perfect tower of strength, serene and impassive, yet kindly in distress.

"Percy," said the young man, "I ran all the way from the top of the Rue St. Honoré. I was only breathless. I am quite all right. May I tell you all about it?"

Without a word Blakeney closed the window and came across to the sofa; he sat down beside Armand, and to all outward appearances he was nothing now but a kind and sympathetic listener to a friend's tale of woe. Not a line in his face or look in his eyes betrayed the thoughts of the leader who had been thwarted at the outset of a dangerous enterprise, or of the man, accustomed to command, who had been so flagrantly disobeyed.

Armand, unconscious of all save of Jeanne and of her immediate need, put an eager hand on Percy's arm.

"Héron and his hell-hounds went back to her lodgings last night," he said, speaking as if he were still a little out of breath. "They hoped to get me, no doubt; not finding me there, they took her. Oh, my God!"

It was the first time that he had put the whole terrible circumstance into words, and it seemed to gain in reality by the recounting. The agony of mind which he endured was almost unbearable; he hid his face in his hands lest Percy should see how terribly he suffered.

"I knew that," said Blakeney quietly.

Armand looked up in surprise.

"How? When did you know it?" he stammered.

"Last night when you left me. I went down to the Square du Roule. I arrived there just too late."

"Percy!" exclaimed Armand, whose pale face had suddenly flushed scarlet, "you did that—last night you——"

"Of course," interposed the other calmly; "had I not promised you to keep watch over her? When I heard the news it was already too late to make further inquiries, but when you arrived just now I was on the point of starting out, in order to find out in what prison Mademoiselle Lange is being detained. I shall have to go soon, Armand, before the guard is changed at the Temple and the Tuileries. This is the safest time, and God knows we are all of us sufficiently compromised already."

The flush of shame deepened in St. Just's cheek. There had not been a hint of reproach in the voice of his chief, and the eyes which regarded him now from beneath the half-closed lids showed nothing but lazy *bonhomie*.

In a moment now Armand realized all the harm which his recklessness had done, was still doing to the work of the League. Every one of his actions since his arrival in Paris two days ago had jeopardized a plan or endangered a life: his friendship with de Batz, his connexion with Mademoiselle Lange, his visit to her yesterday afternoon, the repetition of it this morning, culminating in that wild run through the streets of Paris, when at any moment a spy lurking round a corner might either have barred his way, or, worse still, have followed him to Blakeney's door. Armand, without a thought of anyone save of his beloved, might easily this morning have brought an agent of the Committee of General Security face to face with his chief.

"Percy," he murmured, "can you ever forgive me?"

"Pshaw, man!" retorted Blakeney lightly; "there is naught to forgive, only a great deal that should no longer be forgotten; your duty to the others, for instance, your obedience, and your honour."

"I was mad, Percy! Oh! if you only could understand what she means to me!"

Blakeney laughed, his own light-hearted careless laugh, which so often before now had helped to hide what he really felt from the eyes of the indifferent, and even from those of his friends.

"No! no!" he said lightly, "we agreed last night, did we not? that in matters of sentiment I am a cold-blooded fish. But will you at any rate concede that I am a man of my word? Did I not pledge it last night that Mademoiselle Lange would be safe? I foresaw her arrest the moment I heard your story. I hoped that I might reach her before that brute Héron's return; unfortunately he forestalled me by less than half an hour. Mademoiselle Lange has been arrested, Armand; but why should you not trust me on that account? Have we not succeeded, I and the others, in worse cases than this one? They mean no harm to Jeanne Lange," he added emphatically; "I give you my word on that. They only want her as a decoy. It is you they want. You through her, and me through you. I pledge you my honour that she will be safe. You must try and trust me, Armand. It is much to ask, I know, for you will have to trust me with what is most precious in the world to you; and you will have to obey me blindly, or I shall not be able to keep my word."

"What do you wish me to do?"

"Firstly, you must be outside Paris within the hour. Every minute that you spend inside the city now is full of danger—oh, no! not for you," added Blakeney, checking with a good-humoured gesture Armand's words of protestation, "danger for the others—and for our scheme to-morrow."

"How can I go to St. Germain, Percy, knowing that she——"

"Is under my charge?" interposed the other calmly.

"That should not be so very difficult. Come," he added, placing a kindly hand on the other's shoulder, "you shall not find me such an inhuman monster after all. But I must think of the others, you see, and of the child whom I have sworn to save. But I won't send you as far as St. Germain. Go down to the room below and find a good bundle of rough clothes that will serve you as a disguise, for I imagine that you have lost those which you had on the landing or the stairs of the house in the Square du Roule. In a tin box with the clothes downstairs you will find the packet of miscellaneous certificates of safety. Take an appropriate one, and then start out immediately for Villette. You understand?"

"Yes, yes!" said Armand eagerly. "You want me to join Ffoulkes and Tony."

"Yes. You'll find them probably unloading coal by the canal. Try and get private speech with them as early as maybe, and tell Tony to set out at once for St. Germain, and to join Hastings there, instead of you, whilst you take his place with Ffoulkes."

"Yes, I understand; but how will Tony reach St. Germain?"

"La, my good fellow," said Blakeney gaily, "you may safely trust Tony to go where I send him. Do you but do as I tell you, and leave him to look after himself. And now," he added, speaking more earnestly "the sooner you get out of Paris the better it will be for us all. As you see, I am only sending you to La Villette, because it is not so far, but that I can keep in personal touch with you. Remain close to the gates for an hour after nightfall. I will contrive before they close to bring you news of Mademoiselle Lange."

Armand said no more. The sense of shame in him deepened with every word spoken by his chief. He felt how untrustworthy he had been, how undeserving of the selfless devotion which Percy was showing him even now. The words of gratitude died on his lips; he knew that they would be unwelcome. These Englishmen were so devoid of sentiment, he thought, and his brother-in-law, with all his unselfish and heroic deeds, was, he felt, absolutely callous in matters of the heart.

But Armand was a noble-minded man, and with the true sporting instinct in him, despite the fact that he was a creature of nerves, highly strung and imaginative. He could give ungrudging admiration to his chief, even whilst giving himself up entirely to sentiment for Jeanne.

He tried to imbue himself with the same spirit that actuated my Lord Tony and the other members of the League. How gladly would he have chaffed and made senseless schoolboy jokes like those which—in face of their hazardous enterprise and the dangers which they all ran—had horrified him so much last night.

But somehow he knew that jokes from him would not ring true. How could he smile when his heart was brimming over with his love for Jeanne, and with solicitude on her account? He felt that Percy was regarding him with a kind of indulgent amusement; there was a look of suppressed merriment in the depths of those lazy blue eyes.

So he braced up his nerves, trying his best to look cool and unconcerned, but he could not altogether hide from his friend the burning anxiety which was threatening to break his heart.

"I have given you my word, Armand," said Blakeney in answer to the unspoken prayer; "cannot you try and trust me—as the others do?"

Then with sudden transition he pointed to the map behind him.

"Remember the gate of Villette, and the corner by the tow-path. Join Ffoulkes as soon as maybe and send Tony on his way, and wait for news of Mademoiselle Lange some time to-night."

"God bless you, Percy!" said Armand involuntarily. "Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, my dear fellow. Slip on your disguise as quickly as you can, and be out of the house in a quarter of an hour."

He accompanied Armand through the ante-room, and finally closed the door on him. Then he went back to his room and walked up to the window, which he threw open to the humid morning air. Now that he was alone the look of trouble on his face deepened to a dark, anxious frown, and as he looked out across the river a sigh of bitter impatience and disappointment escaped his lips.

15

THE GATE OF LA VILLETTE

AND now the shades of evening had long since yielded to those of night. The gate of La Villette, at the north-east corner of the city, was about to close. Armand, dressed in the rough clothes of a labouring man, was leaning against a low wall at the angle of the narrow street which abuts on the canal at its further end; from this point of vantage he could command a view of the gate and of the life and bustle around it.

He was dog-tired. After the emotions of the past twenty-four hours, a day's hard manual toil to which he was unaccustomed had caused him to ache in every limb. As soon as he had arrived at the canal wharf in the early morning he had obtained the kind of casual work that ruled about here, and soon was told off to unload a cargo of coal which had arrived by barge overnight. He had set-to with a will, half hoping to kill his anxiety by dint of heavy bodily exertion. During the course of the morning he had suddenly become aware of Sir Antony Ffoulkes and of Lord Antony Dewhurst working not far away from him, and as fine a pair of coal-heavers as any shipper could desire.

It was not very difficult in the midst of the noise and activity that reigned all about the wharf for the three men to exchange a few words together, and Armand soon communicated the chief's new instructions to my Lord Tony, who effectually slipped away from his work some time during the day. Armand did not even see him go, it had all been so neatly done.

Just before five o'clock in the afternoon the labourers were paid off. It was then too dark to continue work. Armand would have liked to talk to Sir Andrew, if only for a moment. He felt lonely and desperately anxious. He had hoped to tire out his nerves as well as his body, but in this he had not succeeded. As soon as he had given up his tools, his brain began to work again more busily than ever. It followed Percy in his peregrinations through the city, trying to discover where those brutes were keeping Jeanne.

That task had suddenly loomed up before Armand's mind with all its terrible difficulties. How could Percy—a marked man if ever there was one—go from prison to prison to inquire about Jeanne? The very idea seemed preposterous. Armand ought never to have consented to such an insensate plan. The more he thought of it, the more impossible did it seem that Blakeney could find anything out.

Sir Andrew Ffoulks was nowhere to be seen. St. Just wandered about in the dark, lonely streets of this outlying quarter vainly trying to find the friend in whom he could confide, who, no doubt, would reassure him as to Blakeney's probable movements in Paris. Then as the hour approached for the closing of the city gates Armand took up his stand at an angle of the street from whence he could see both the gate on one side of him and the thin line of the canal intersecting the street at its further end.

Unless Percy came within the next five minutes the gates would be closed and the difficulties of crossing the barrier would be increased an hundredfold. The market gardeners with their covered carts filed out of the gate one by one; the labourers on foot were returning to their homes; there was a group of stonemasons, a few road-makers, also a number of beggars, ragged and filthy, who herded somewhere in the neighbourhood of the canal.

In every form, under every disguise, Armand hoped to discover Percy. He could not stand still for very long, but strode up and down the road that skirts the fortifications at this point.

There were a good many idlers about at this hour; some men who had finished their work, and meant to spend an hour or so in one of the drinking-shops that abounded in the neighbourhood of the wharf; others who liked to gather a small knot of listeners around them, whilst they discoursed on the politics of the day, or rather raged against the Convention, which was all made up of traitors to the people's welfare.

Armand, trying manfully to play his part, joined one of the groups that stood gaping round a street orator.

He shouted with the best of them, waved his cap in the air, and applauded or hissed in unison with the majority. But his eyes never wandered for long away from the gate whence Percy must come now at any moment—now or not at all.

At what precise moment the awful doubt took birth in his mind the young man could not afterwards have said. Perhaps it was when he heard the roll of drums proclaiming the closing of the gates, and witnessed the changing of the guard.

Percy had not come. He could not come now, and he (Armand) would have the night to face without news of Jeanne. Something, of course, had detained Percy; perhaps he had been unable to get definite information about Jeanne; perhaps the information which he had obtained was too terrible to communicate.

If only Sir Andrew Ffoulkes had been there, and Armand had had some one to talk to, perhaps then he would have found sufficient strength of mind to wait with outward patience, even though his nerves were on the rack.

Darkness closed in around him, and with the darkness came the full return of the phantoms that had assailed him in the house of the Square du Roule when first he had heard of Jeanne's arrest. The open place facing the gate had transformed itself into the Place de la Révolution, the tall rough post that held a flickering oil lamp had become the gaunt arm of the guillotine, the feeble light of the lamp was the knife that gleamed with the reflection of a crimson light.

And Armand saw himself, as in a vision, one of a vast and noisy throng—they were all pressing round him so that he could not move; they were brandishing caps and tricolour flags, also pitchforks and scythes. He had seen such a crowd four years ago rushing towards the Bastille. Now they were all assembled here around him and around the guillotine.

Suddenly a distant rattle caught his subconscious ear: the rattle of wheels on rough cobble-stones. Immediately the crowd began to cheer and to shout; some sang the "Ça ira!" and others screamed:

"Les aristos! à la lanterne! à mort! à mort! les aristos!"

He saw it all quite plainly, for the darkness had vanished and the vision was more vivid than even reality could have been. The rattle of wheels grew louder, and presently the cart debouched on the open place.

Men and women sat huddled up in the cart; but in the midst of them a woman stood, and her eyes were fixed upon Armand. She wore her pale-grey satin gown, and a white kerchief was folded across her bosom. Her brown hair fell in loose, soft curls all round her head. She looked exactly like the exquisite cameo which Marguerite used to wear. Her hands were tied with cords behind her back, but between her fingers she held a small bunch of violets.

Armand saw it all. It was, of course, a vision, and he knew that it was one, but he believed that the vision was prophetic. No thought of the chief whom he had sworn to trust and to obey came to chase away these imaginings of his fevered fancy. He saw Jeanne, and only Jeanne, standing on the tumbril and being led to the guillotine. Sir Andrew was not there, and Percy had not come. Armand believed that a direct message had come to him from heaven to save his beloved.

Therefore he forgot his promise—his oath; he forgot those very things which the leader had entreated him to remember—his duty to the others, his loyalty, his obedience. Jeanne had first claim on him. It were the act of a coward to remain in safety whilst she was in such deadly danger.

Now he blamed himself severely for having quitted Paris. Even Percy must have thought him a coward for obeying quite so readily. Maybe the command had been but a test of his courage, of the strength of his love for Jeanne.

A hundred conjectures flashed through his brain; a hundred plans presented themselves to his mind. It was not for Percy, who did not know her, to save Jeanne or to guard her. That task was Armand's, who worshipped her, and who would gladly die beside her if he failed to rescue her from threatened death.

Resolution was not slow in coming. A tower clock inside the city struck the hour of six, and still no sign of Percy.

Armand, his certificate of safety in his hand, walked boldly up to the gate.

The guard challenged him, but he presented the certificate. There was an agonizing moment when the card was taken from him, and he was detained in the guard-room while it was being examined by the sergeant in command.

But the certificate was in good order, and Armand, covered in coal-dust, with the perspiration streaming down his face, did certainly not look like an aristocrat in disguise. It was never very difficult to enter the great city; if one wished to put one's head in the lion's mouth, one was welcome to do so; the difficulty came when the lion thought fit to close his jaws.

Armand, after five minutes of tense anxiety, was allowed to cross the barrier, but his certificate of safety was detained. He would have to get another from the Committee of General Security before he would be allowed to leave Paris again.

The lion had thought fit to close his jaws.

16

THE WEARY SEARCH

Blakeney was not at his lodgings when Armand arrived there that evening, nor did he return, whilst the young man haunted the precincts of St. Germain l'Auxerrois and wandered along the quays hours and hours at a stretch, until he nearly dropped upon the portico of a house, and realized that if he loitered longer he might lose consciousness completely, and be unable on the morrow to be of service to Jeanne.

He dragged his weary footsteps back to his own lodgings on the heights of Montmartre. He had not found Percy, he had no news of Jeanne; it seemed as if hell itself could hold no worse tortures than this intolerable suspense.

He threw himself down on the narrow palliasse and, tired Nature asserting herself, at last fell into a heavy, dreamless torpor, like the sleep of a drunkard, deep but without the beneficent aid of rest.

It was broad daylight when he awoke. The pale light of a damp, wintry morning filtered through the grimy panes of the window. Armand jumped out of bed, aching of limb but resolute of mind. There was no doubt that Percy had failed in discovering Jeanne's whereabouts; but where a mere friend had failed a lover was more likely to succeed.

The rough clothes which he had worn yesterday were the only ones he had. They would, of course, serve his purpose better than his own, which he had left at Blakeney's lodgings yesterday. In half an hour he was dressed, looking a fairly good imitation of a labourer out of work.

He went to a humble eating-house of which he knew, and there, having ordered some hot coffee with a hunk of bread, he set himself to think.

It was quite a usual thing these days for relatives and friends of prisoners to go wandering about from prison to prison to find out where the loved ones happened to be detained. The prisons were overfull just now; convents, monasteries, and public institutions had all been requisitioned by the Government for the housing of the hundreds of so-called traitors who had been arrested on the barest suspicion, or at the mere denunciation of an evil-wisher.

There were the Abbaye and the Luxembourg, the erstwhile convents of the Visitation and the Sacré-Cœur, the cloister of the Oratorians, the Salpêtrière, and the St. Lazare hospitals, and there was, of course, the Temple, and, lastly, the Conciergerie, to which those prisoners were brought whose trial would take place within the next few days, and whose condemnation was practically assured.

Persons under arrest at some of the other prisons did sometimes come out of them alive, but the Conciergerie was only the antechamber of the guillotine.

Therefore Armand's idea was to visit the Conciergerie first. The sooner he could reassure himself that Jeanne was not in immediate danger the better would he be able to endure the agony of that heart-breaking search, that knocking at every door in the hope of finding his beloved.

If Jeanne was not in the Conciergerie, then there might be some hope that she was only being temporarily detained, and through Armand's excited brain there had already flashed the thought that mayhap the Committee of General Security would release her if he gave himself up.

These thoughts and the making of plans, fortified him mentally and physically; he even made a great effort to eat and drink, knowing that his bodily strength must endure if it was going to be of service to Jeanne.

He reached the Quai de l'Horloge soon after nine. The grim irregular walls of the Châtelet and the house of Justice loomed from out the mantle of mist that lay on the river banks. Armand skirted the square clock-tower, and passed through the monumental gateways of the house of Justice.

He knew that his best way to the prison would be through the halls and corridors of the Tribunal, to which the public had access whenever the court was sitting. The sittings began at ten, and already the usual crowd of idlers was assembling—men and women who apparently had no other occupation save to come day after day to this theatre of horrors and watch the different acts of the heartrending dramas that were enacted here with a kind of awful monotony.

Armand mingled with the crowd that stood about the courtyard, and anon moved slowly up the gigantic flight of stone steps, talking lightly on indifferent subjects. There was quite a goodly sprinkling of working-men amongst this crowd, and Armand in his toil-stained clothes attracted no attention.

Suddenly a word reached his ear—just a name flippantly spoken by spiteful lips—and it changed the whole trend of his thoughts. Since he had risen that morning he had thought of nothing but of Jeanne, and—in connection with her—of Percy and his vain quest of her. Now that name spoken by some one unknown brought his mind back to more definite thoughts of his chief.

"Capet!" the name—intended as an insult, but actually merely irrelevant—whereby the uncrowned little King of France was designated by the revolutionary party.

Armand suddenly recollected that to-day was Sunday, the 19th of January. He had lost count of days and of dates lately, but the name, "Capet," had brought everything back; the child in the Temple; the conference in Blakeney's lodgings; the plans for the rescue of the boy. That was to take place to-day—Sunday, the 19th. The Simons would be moving from the Temple, at what hour Blakeney did not know, but it would be to-day, and he would be watching his opportunity.

Now Armand understood everything; a great wave of bitterness swept over his soul. Percy had forgotten Jeanne! He was busy thinking of the child in the Temple and whilst Armand had been eating out his heart with anxiety, the Scarlet Pimpernel, true only to his mission, and impatient of all sentiment that interfered with his schemes, had left Jeanne to pay with her life for the safety of the uncrowned King.

But the bitterness did not last long; on the contrary, a kind of wild exultation took its place. If Percy had forgotten, then Armand could stand by Jeanne alone. It was better so! He would save the loved one; it was his duty and his right to work for her sake. Never for a moment did he doubt that he could save her, that his life would be readily accepted in exchange for hers.

The crowd around him was moving up the monumental steps, and Armand went with the crowd. It lacked but a few minutes to ten now; soon the court would begin to sit. In the olden days, when he was studying for the law, Armand had often wandered about at will along the corridors of the house of Justice. He knew exactly where the different prisons were situated about the buildings, and how to reach the courtyards where the prisoners took their daily exercise.

To watch those aristos who were awaiting trial and death taking their recreation in these courtyards had become one of the sights of Paris. Country cousins on a visit to the city were brought hither for entertainment. Tall iron gates stood between the public and the prisoners, and a row of sentinels guarded these gates; but if one was enterprising and eager to see, one could glue one's nose against the ironwork and watch the ci-devant aristocrats in threadbare clothes trying to cheat their horror of death by acting a farce of light-heartedness which their wan faces and tear-dimmed eyes effectually belied.

All this Armand knew, and on this he counted. For a little while he joined the crowd in the Salle des Pas Perdus, and wandered idly up and down the majestic colonnaded hall. He even at one time formed part of the throng that watched one of those quick tragedies that were enacted within the great chamber of the court. A number of prisoners brought in, in a batch; hurried interrogations, interrupted answers, a quick indictment, monstrous in its flaring injustice, spoken by Foucquier-Tinville, the Public Prosecutor, and listened to in all seriousness by men who dared to call themselves judges of their fellows.

The accused had walked down the Champs Elysées without wearing a tricolour cockade; the other had invested some savings in an English industrial enterprise; yet another had sold public funds, causing them to depreciate rather suddenly in the market!

Sometimes from one of these unfortunates led thus wantonly to butchery there would come an excited protest, or from a woman screams of agonized entreaty. But these were quickly silenced by rough blows from the butt-ends of muskets, and condemnations—wholesale sentences of death—were quickly passed amidst the cheers of the spectators and the howls of derision from infamous jury and judge.

Oh! the mockery of it all—the awful, the hideous ignominy, the blot of shame that would for ever sully the historic name of France!

Armand, sickened with horror, could not bear more than a few minutes of this monstrous spectacle. The same fate might even now be awaiting Jeanne. Among the next batch of victims to this sacrilegious butchery he might suddenly spy his beloved with her pale face and cheeks stained with her tears.

He fled from the great chamber, keeping just a sufficiency of presence of mind to join a knot of idlers who were drifting leisurely towards the corridors. He followed in their wake and soon found himself in the long Galerie des Prisonniers.

On his left now were the arcades, shut off from the courtyard beyond by heavy iron gates. Through the ironwork Armand caught sight of a number of women walking or sitting in the courtyard. He heard a man next to him explaining to his friend that these were the female prisoners who would be brought to trial that day, and he felt that his heart must burst at the thought that mayhap Jeanne would be among them.

He elbowed his way cautiously to the front rank. Soon he found himself beside a sentinel, who, with a good-humoured jest, made way for him that he might watch the aristos. Armand leaned against the grating, and his every sense was concentrated in that of sight.

At first he could scarcely distinguish one woman from another amongst the crowd that thronged the courtyard, and the close ironwork hindered his view considerably. The women looked almost like phantoms in the grey misty air, gliding slowly along with noiseless tread on the flagstones.

Presently, however, his eyes, which mayhap were somewhat dim with tears, became more accustomed to the hazy grey light and the moving figures that looked so like shadows. He could distinguish isolated groups now, women and girls sitting together under the colonnaded arcades, some reading, others busy, with trembling fingers, patching and darning a poor, torn gown. Then there were others who were actually chatting and laughing together, and—oh, the pity of it! the pity and the shame!—a few children, shrieking with delight, were playing hide and seek in and out amongst the columns.

And, between them all, in and out like the children at play, unseen, yet familiar to all, the spectre of Death, scythe and hour-glass in hand, wandered, majestic and sure.

Armand's very soul was in his eyes. So far he had not yet caught sight of his beloved, and slowly—very slowly—a ray of hope was filtering through the darkness of his despair.

The sentinel, who had stood aside for him, chaffed him for his intentness.

"Have you a sweetheart among these aristos, citizen?" he asked. "You seem to be devouring them with your eyes."

Armand, with his rough clothes soiled with coal-dust, his face grimy and streaked with sweat, certainly looked to have but little in common with the ci-devant aristos who formed the bulk of the groups in the courtyard. He looked up; the soldier was regarding him with obvious amusement, and at sight of Armand's wild, anxious eyes he gave vent to a coarse jest.

"Have I made a shrewd guess, citizen?" he said. "Is she among that lot?"

"I do not know where she is," said Armand almost involuntarily.

"Then why don't you find out?" queried the soldier.

The man was not speaking altogether unkindly. Armand, devoured with the maddening desire to know, threw the last fragment of prudence to the wind. He assumed a more careless air, trying to look as like a country bumpkin in love as he could.

"I would like to find out," he said, "but I don't know where to inquire. My sweetheart has certainly left her home," he added lightly; "some say that she has been false to me, but I think that, mayhap, she has been arrested."

"Well, then, you gaby," said the soldier good-humouredly, "go straight to La Tournelle; you know where it is?"

Armand knew well enough, but thought it more prudent to keep up the air of the ignorant lout.

"Straight down that first corridor on your right," explained the other, pointing in the direction which he had indicated, "you will find the *guichet* of La Tournelle exactly opposite to you. Ask the concierge for the register of female prisoners—every freeborn citizen of the Republic has the right to inspect prison registers. It is a new decree framed for safeguarding the liberty of the people. But if you do not press half a livre in the hand of the concierge," he added, speaking confidentially, "you will find that the register will not be quite ready for your inspection."

"Half a livre!" exclaimed Armand, striving to play his part to the end. "How can a poor devil of a labourer have half a livre to give away?"

"Well! a few sous will do in that case; a few sous are always welcome these hard times."

Armand took the hint, and as the crowd had drifted away momentarily to a further portion of the corridor, he contrived to press a few copper coins into the hand of the obliging soldier.

Of course, he knew his way to La Tournelle, and he would have covered the distance that separated him from the *guichet* there with steps flying like the wind, but, commending himself for his own prudence, he walked as slowly as he could along the interminable corridor, past the several minor courts of justice, and skirting the courtyard where the male prisoners took their exercise.

At last, having struck sharply to his left and ascended a short flight of stairs, he found himself in front of the *guichet*—a narrow wooden box, wherein the clerk in charge of the prison registers sat nominally at the disposal of the citizens of this free republic.

But to Armand's almost overwhelming chagrin he found the place entirely deserted. The *guichet* was closed down; there was not a soul in sight. The disappointment was doubly keen, coming as it did in the wake of hope that had refused to be gainsaid. Armand himself did not realize how sanguine he had been until he discovered that he must wait and wait again—wait for hours, all day mayhap, before he could get definite news of Jeanne.

He wandered aimlessly in the vicinity of that silent, deserted, cruel spot, where a closed trap-door seemed to shut off all his hopes of a speedy sight of Jeanne. He inquired of the first sentinels whom he came across at what hour the clerk of the registers would be back at his post; the soldiers shrugged their shoulders and could give no information. Then began Armand's aimless wanderings round La Tournelle, his fruitless inquiries, his wild, excited search for the hide-bound official who was keeping him from the knowledge of Jeanne.

He went back to his sentinel well-wisher by the women's courtyard, but found neither consolation nor encouragement there.

"It is not the hour—quoi?" the soldier remarked with laconic philosophy.

It apparently was not the hour when the prison registers were placed at the disposal of the public. After much fruitless inquiry, Armand at last was informed by a *bon bourgeois*, who was wandering about the house of Justice and who seemed to know its multifarious rules, that the prison registers all over Paris could only be consulted by the public between the hours of six and seven in the evening.

There was nothing for it but to wait. Armand, whose temples were throbbing, who was footsore, hungry, and wretched, could gain nothing by continuing his aimless wanderings through the labyrinthine building. For close upon another hour he stood with his face glued against the ironwork which separated him from the female prisoners' courtyard. Once it seemed to him as if from its further end he caught the sound of that exquisitely melodious voice which had rung for ever in his ear since that memorable evening when Jeanne's dainty footsteps had first crossed the path of his destiny. He strained his eyes to look whence the voice had come, but the centre of the courtyard was planted with a small garden of shrubs, and Armand could not see across it. At last, driven forth like a wandering and lost soul, he turned back and out into the streets. The air was mild and damp. The sharp thaw had persisted through the day, and a thin misty rain was falling and converting the ill-paved roads into seas of mud.

But of this Armand was wholly unconscious. He walked along the quay holding his cap in his hand, so that the mild south wind should cool his burning forehead.

How he contrived to kill those long, weary hours he could not afterwards have said. Once he felt very hungry, and turned almost mechanically into an eating-house, and tried to eat and drink. But most of the day he wandered through the streets, restlessly, unceasingly, feeling neither chill nor fatigue. The hour before six o'clock found him on the Quai de l'Horloge in the shadow of the great towers of the Hall of Justice, listening for the clang of the clock that would sound the hour of his deliverance from this agonizing torture of suspense.

He found his way to La Tournelle without any hesitation. There before him was the wooden box, with its *guichet* open at last, and two stands upon its ledge, on which were placed two huge leather-bound books.

Though Armand was nearly an hour before the appointed time, he saw when he arrived a number of people standing round the *guichet*. Two soldiers were there keeping guard and forcing the patient, long-suffering inquirers to stand in a queue, each waiting his or her turn at the books.

It was a curious crowd that stood there, in single file, as if waiting at the door of the cheaper part of a theatre; men in substantial cloth clothes, and others in ragged blouse and breeches; there were a few women, too, with black shawls on their shoulders and kerchiefs round their wan, tear-stained faces.

They were all silent and absorbed, submissive under the rough handling of the soldiery, humble and deferential when anon the clerk of the registers entered his box, and prepared to place those fateful books at the disposal of those who had lost a loved one—father, brother, mother, or wife—and had come to search through those cruel pages.

From inside his box the clerk disputed every inquirer's right to consult the books; he made as many difficulties as he could demanding the production of certificates of safety, or permits from the section. He was as insolent as he dared, and Armand from where he stood could see that a continuous if somewhat thin stream of coppers flowed from the hands of the inquirers into those of the official.

It was quite dark in the passage where the long queue continued to swell with amazing rapidity. Only on the ledge in front of the *guichet* there was a guttering tallow candle at the disposal of the inquirers.

Now it was Armand's turn at last. By this time his heart was beating so strongly and so rapidly that he could not have trusted himself to speak. He fumbled in his pocket, and without unnecessary preliminaries he produced a small piece of silver, and pushed it towards the clerk, then he seized on the register marked "Femmes" with voracious avidity.

The clerk had with stolid indifference pocketed the half-livre; he looked on Armand over a pair of large bone-rimmed spectacles, with the air of an old hawk that sees a helpless bird and yet is too satiated to eat. He was apparently vastly amused at Armand's trembling hands, and the clumsy, aimless way with which he fingered the book, and held up the tallow candle.

"What date?" he asked curtly in a piping voice.

"What date?" reiterated Armand vaguely.

"What day and hour was she arrested?" said the man, thrusting his beak-like nose closer to Armand's face. Evidently the piece of silver had done its work well; he meant to be helpful to this country lout.

"On Friday evening," murmured the young man.

The clerk's hands did not in character gainsay the rest of his appearance; they were long and thin, with nails that resembled the talons of a hawk. Armand watched them fascinated as from above they turned over rapidly the pages of the book; then one long, grimy finger pointed to a row of names down a column.

"If she is here," said the man curtly, "her name should be amongst these."

Armand's vision was blurred. He could scarcely see. The row of names was dancing a wild dance in front of his eyes; perspiration stood out on his forehead, and his breath came in quick, stertorous gasps.

He never knew afterwards whether he actually saw Jeanne's name there in the book, or whether his fevered brain was playing his aching senses a cruel and mocking trick. Certain it is that suddenly amongst a row of indifferent names hers suddenly stood clearly on the page, and to him it seemed as if the letters were writ out in blood.

582. Belhomme, Louise, aged sixty. Discharged.

And just below, the other entry:

583. Lange, Jeanne, aged twenty, actress. Square du Roule No. 5. Suspected of harbouring traitors and ci-devants. Transferred 29th Nivôse to the Temple, cell 29.

He saw nothing more, for suddenly it seemed to him as if some one held a vivid scarlet veil in front of his eyes, whilst a hundred claw-like hands were tearing at his heart and at his throat.

"Clear out now! it is my turn—what? Are you going to stand there all night?"

A rough voice seemed to be speaking these words; rough hands apparently were pushing him out of the way, and some one snatched the candle out of his hand; but nothing was real. He stumbled over the corner of a loose flagstone, and would have fallen, but something seemed to catch hold of him and to lead him away for a little distance, until a breath of cold air blew upon his face.

This brought him back to his senses.

Jeanne was a prisoner in the Temple; then his place was in the prison of the Temple, too. It could not be very difficult to run one's head into the noose that caught so many necks these days. A few cries of "Vive le roi!" or "À bas la république" and more than one prison door would gape invitingly to receive another guest.

The hot blood had rushed into Armand's head. He did not see clearly before him, nor did he hear distinctly. There was a buzzing in his ears as of myriads of mocking birds' wings, and there was a veil in front of his eyes—a veil through which he saw faces and forms flitting ghost-like in the gloom, men and women jostling or being jostled, soldiers, sentinels; then long, interminable corridors, more crowd and more soldiers, winding stairs, courtyards and gates; finally the open street, the quay, and the river beyond.

An incessant hammering went on in his temples, and that veil never lifted from before his eyes. Now it was lurid and red, as if stained with blood; anon it was white like a shroud, but it was always there.

Through it he saw the Pont au Change, which he crossed, then far down on the Quai de l'Ecole to the left the corner house behind St. Germain l'Auxerrois, where Blakeney lodged—Blakeney, who for the sake of a stranger had forgotten all about his comrade and Jeanne.

Through it he saw the network of streets which separated him from the neighbourhood of the Temple, the gardens of ruined habitations, the closely-shuttered and barred windows of ducal houses, then the mean streets, the crowded drinking-bars, the tumble-down shops with their dilapidated awnings.

He saw with eyes that did not see, heard the tumult of daily life round him with ears that did not hear. Jeanne was in the Temple Prison, and when its grim gates closed finally for the night, he—Armand, her chevalier, her lover, her defender—would be within its walls as near to cell No. 29 as bribery, entreaty, promises would help him to attain.

Ah! there at last loomed the great building, the pointed bastions cut through the surrounding gloom as with a sable knife.

Armand reached the gate; the sentinels challenged him; he replied:

"Vive le roi!" shouting wildly like one who is drunk.

He was hatless, and his clothes were saturated with moisture. He tried to pass, but crossed bayonets barred the way. Still he shouted:

"Vive le roi!" and "À bas la république!"

"Allons! the fellow is drunk!" said one of the soldiers.

Armand fought like a madman; he wanted to reach that gate. He shouted, he laughed, and he cried, until one of the soldiers in a fit of rage struck him heavily on the head.

Armand fell backwards, stunned by the blow; his foot slipped on the wet pavement. Was he indeed drunk, or was he dreaming? He put his hand up to his forehead; it was wet, but whether with the rain or with blood he did not know; but for the space of one second he tried to collect his scattered wits.

"Citizen St. Just!" said a quiet voice at his elbow.

Then, as he looked round, dazed, feeling a firm, pleasant grip on his arm, the same quiet voice continued calmly:

"Perhaps you do not remember me, citizen St. Just. I had not the honour of the same close friendship with you as I had with your charming sister. My name is Chauvelin. Can I be of any service to you?"

17

CHAUVELIN

CHAUVELIN! The presence of this man here at this moment made the events of the past few days seem more absolutely like a dream. Chauvelin!—the most deadly enemy he, Armand, and his sister Marguerite had in the world. Chauvelin!—the evil genius that presided over the Secret Service of the Republic. Chauvelin!—the aristocrat turned revolutionary, the diplomat turned spy, the baffled enemy of the Scarlet Pimpernel.

He stood there vaguely outlined in the gloom by the feeble rays of an oil lamp fixed into the wall just above. The moisture on his sable clothes glistened in the flickering light like a thin veil of crystal; it clung to the rim of his hat, to the folds of his cloak; the ruffles at his throat and wrist hung limp and soiled.

He had released Armand's arm, and held his hands now underneath his cloak; his pale, deep-set eyes rested gravely on the younger man's face.

"I had an idea, somehow," continued Chauvelin calmly, "that you and I would meet during your sojourn in Paris. I heard from my friend Héron that you had been in the city; he, unfortunately, lost your track almost as soon as he had found it, and I, too, had begun to fear that our mutual and ever-enigmatical friend, the Scarlet Pimpernel, had spirited you away, which would have been a great disappointment to me."

Then he once more took hold of Armand by the elbow but quite gently, more like a comrade who is glad to have met another, and is preparing to enjoy a pleasant conversation for a while. He led the way back to the gate, the sentinel saluting at sight of the tricolour scarf which was visible underneath his cloak. Under the stone rampart Chauvelin paused.

It was quiet and private here. The group of soldiers stood at the further end of the archway, but they were out of hearing, and their forms were only vaguely discernible in the surrounding darkness.

Armand had followed his enemy mechanically like one bewitched and irresponsible for his actions. When Chauvelin paused he too stood still, not because of the grip on his arm, but because of that curious numbing of his will.

Vague, confused thoughts were floating through his brain, the most dominant one among them being that Fate had effectually ordained everything for the best. Here was Chauvelin, a man who hated him, who, of course, would wish to see him dead. Well, surely it must be an easier matter now to barter his own life for that of Jeanne; she had only been arrested on suspicion of harbouring him, who was a known traitor to the Republic; then, with his capture and speedy death, her supposed guilt would, he hoped, be forgiven. These people could have no ill-will against her, and actors and actresses were always leniently dealt with when possible. Then surely, surely, he could serve Jeanne better by his own arrest and condemnation than by working to rescue her from prison.

In the meanwhile Chauvelin shook the damp off his cloak, talking all the time in his own peculiar, gently ironical manner.

"Lady Blakeney?" he was saying—"I hope that she is well!"

"I thank you, sir," murmured Armand mechanically.

"And my dear friend, Sir Percy Blakeney? I had hoped to meet him in Paris. Ah! but no doubt he has been busy—very busy; but I live in hopes—I live in hopes. See how kindly Chance has treated me," he continued in the same bland and mocking tones. "I was taking a stroll in these parts, scarce hoping to meet a friend, when, passing the postern-gate of this charming hostelry, whom should I see but my amiable friend St. Just striving to gain admission. But, la! here am I talking of myself and I am not reassured as to your state of health. You felt faint just now, did you not? The air about this building is very dank and close. I hope you feel better now. Command me, pray, if I can be of service to you in any way."

Whilst Chauvelin talked he had drawn Armand after him into the lodge of the concierge. The young man now made a great effort to pull himself vigorously together and to steady his nerves.

He had his wish. He was inside the Temple Prison now, not far from Jeanne, and though his enemy was older and less vigorous than himself, and the door of the concierge's lodge stood wide open, he knew that he was indeed as effectually a prisoner already as if the door of one of the numerous cells in this gigantic building had been bolted and barred upon him.

This knowledge helped him to recover his complete presence of mind. No thought of fighting or trying to escape his fate entered his head for a moment. It had been useless probably, and undoubtedly it was better so. If he only could see Jeanne, and assure himself that she would be safe in consequence of his own arrest, then, indeed, life could hold no greater happiness for him.

Above all now he wanted to be cool and calculating, to curb the excitement which the Latin blood in him called forth at every mention of the loved one's name. He tried to think of Percy, of his calmness, his easy banter with an enemy; he resolved to act as Percy would act under these circumstances.

Firstly, he steadied his voice, and drew his well-knit, slim figure upright. He called to mind all his friends in England, with their rigid manners, their impassiveness in the face of trying situations. There was Lord Tony, for instance, always ready with some boyish joke, with boyish impertinence always hovering on his tongue. Armand tried to emulate Lord Tony's manner, and to borrow something of Percy's calm impudence.

"Citizen Chauvelin," he said, as soon as he felt quite sure of the steadiness of his voice and the calmness of his manner, "I wonder if you are quite certain that that light grip which you have on my arm is sufficient to keep me here walking quietly by your side instead of knocking you down, as I certainly feel inclined to do, for I am a younger, more athletic man than you."

"H'm!" said Chauvelin, who made pretence to ponder over this difficult problem; "like you, citizen St. Just, I wonder——"

"It could easily be done, you know."

"Fairly easily," rejoined the other; "but there is the guard; it is numerous and strong in this building, and——"

"The gloom would help me; it is dark in the corridors, and a desperate man takes risks, remember——"

"Quite so! And you, citizen St. Just, are a desperate man just now."

"My sister Marguerite is not here, citizen Chauvelin. You cannot barter my life for that of your enemy."

"No! no! no!" rejoined Chauvelin blandly; "not for that of my enemy, I know, but——"

Armand caught at his words like a drowning man at a reed.

"For hers!" he exclaimed.

"For hers?" queried the other with obvious puzzlement.

"Mademoiselle Lange," continued Armand with all the egoistic ardour of the lover who believes that the attention of the entire world is concentrated upon his beloved. "Mademoiselle Lange! You will set her free now that I am in your power?"

Chauvelin smiled, his usual suave, enigmatical smile.

"Ah, yes!" he said. "Mademoiselle Lange. I had forgotten."

"Forgotten, man?—forgotten that those murderous dogs have arrested her?—the best, the purest, this vile, degraded country has ever produced. She sheltered me one day just for an hour. I am a traitor to the Republic—I own it. I'll make full confession; but she knew nothing of this. I deceived her; she is quite innocent, you understand? I'll make full confession, but you must set her free."

He had gradually worked himself up again to a state of feverish excitement. Through the darkness which hung about in this small room he tried to peer in Chauvelin's impassive face.

"Easy, easy, my young friend," said the other placidly, "you seem to imagine that I have something to do with the arrest of the lady in whom you take so deep an interest. You forget that now I am but a discredited servant of the Republic whom I failed to serve in her need. My life is only granted me out of pity for my efforts, which were genuine if not successful. I have no power to set anyone free."

"Nor to arrest me now, in that case!" retorted Armand.

Chauvelin paused a moment before he replied with a deprecating smile:

"Only to denounce you, perhaps. I am still an agent of the Committee of General Security."

"Then all is for the best!" exclaimed St. Just eagerly. "You shall denounce me to the Committee. They will be glad of my arrest, I assure you. I have been a marked man for some time. I had intended to evade arrest and to work for the rescue of Mademoiselle Lange; but I will give up all thought of that—I will deliver myself into your hands absolutely; nay, more, I will give you my most solemn word of honour that not only will I make no attempt to escape, but that I will not allow anyone to help me to do so. I will be a passive and willing prisoner if you, on the other hand, will effect Mademoiselle Lange's release."

"H'm!" mused Chauvelin again; "it sounds feasible."

"It does! it does!" rejoined Armand, whose excitement was at fever-pitch. "My arrest, my condemnation, my death, will be of vast deal more importance to you than that of a young and innocent girl against whom unlikely charges would have to be tricked up, and whose acquittal mayhap public feeling might demand. As for me, I shall be an easy prey; my known counter-revolutionary principles, my sister's marriage with a foreigner——"

"Your connection with the Scarlet Pimpernel," suggested Chauvelin blandly.

"Quite so. I should not defend myself——"

"And your enigmatical friend would not attempt your rescue. C'est entendu," said Chauvelin with his wonted blandness. "Then, my dear enthusiastic young friend, shall we adjourn to the office of my colleague, citizen Héron, who is chief agent of the Committee of General Security, and will receive your—did you say confession?—and note the conditions under which you place yourself absolutely in the hands of the Public Prosecutor and subsequently of the executioner? Is that it?"

Armand was too full of schemes, too full of thoughts of Jeanne to note the tone of quiet irony with which Chauvelin had been speaking all along. With the unreasoning egoism of youth he was quite convinced that his own arrest, his own affairs were as important to this entire nation in revolution as they were to himself. At moments like these it is difficult to envisage a desperate situation clearly, and to a young man in love the fate of the beloved never seems desperate whilst he himself is alive and ready for every sacrifice for her sake. "My life for hers" is the sublime if often foolish battle-cry that has at times resulted in wholesale destruction. Armand at this moment, when he fondly believed that he was making a bargain with the most astute, most unscrupulous spy this revolutionary Government had in its pay—Armand just then had absolutely forgotten his chief, his friends, the league of mercy and help to which he belonged.

Enthusiasm and the spirit of self-sacrifice were carrying him away. He watched his enemy with glowing eyes as one who looks on the arbiter of his fate.

Chauvelin, without another word, beckoned to him to follow. He led the way out of the lodge, then, turning sharply to his left, he reached the wide quadrangle with the covered passage running right round it, the same which de Batz had traversed two evenings before, when he went to visit Héron.

Armand, with a light heart and springy step, followed him as if he were going to a feast where he would meet Jeanne, where he would kneel at her feet, kiss her hands, and lead her triumphantly to freedom and to happiness.

18

THE REMOVAL

Chauvelin no longer made any pretence to hold Armand by the arm. By temperament as well as by profession a spy, there was one subject at least which he had mastered thoroughly; that was the study of human nature. Though occasionally an exceptionally complex mental organization baffled him—as in the case of Sir Percy Blakeney—he prided himself, and justly, too, on reading natures like that of Armand St. Just as he would an open book.

The excitable disposition of the Latin races he knew out and out; he knew exactly how far a sentimental situation would lead a young Frenchman like Armand, who was by disposition chivalrous, and by temperament essentially passionate. Above all things, he knew when and how far he could trust a man to do either a sublime action or an absurdly foolish one.

Therefore he walked along contentedly now, not even looking back to see whether St. Just was following him. He knew that he did.

His thoughts only dwelt on the young enthusiast—in his mind he called him the young fool—in order to weigh in the balance the mighty possibilities that would accrue from the present sequence of events. The fixed idea ever working in the man's scheming brain had already transformed a vague belief into a certainty. That the Scarlet Pimpernel was in Paris at the present moment Chauvelin had now become convinced. How far he could turn the capture of Armand St. Just to the triumph of his own ends remained to be seen.

But this he did know; the Scarlet Pimpernel—the man whom he had learned to know, to dread, and even in a grudging manner to admire—was not likely to leave one of his followers in the lurch. Marguerite's brother in the Temple would be the surest decoy for the elusive meddler who still, and in spite of all care and precaution, continued to baffle the army of spies set upon his track.

Chauvelin could hear Armand's light, elastic footsteps resounding behind him on the flagstones. A world of intoxicating possibilities surged up before him. Ambition, which two successive dire failures had atrophied in his breast, once more rose up buoyant and hopeful. Once he had sworn to lay the Scarlet Pimpernel by the heels, and that oath was not yet wholly forgotten; it had lain dormant after the catastrophe of Boulogne, but with the sight of Armand St. Just it had re-awakened and confronted him again with the strength of a likely fulfilment.

The courtyard looked gloomy and deserted. The thin drizzle which still fell from a persistently leaden sky effectually held every outline of masonry, of column, or of gate hidden as beneath a shroud. The corridor which skirted it all round was ill-lighted, having only an occasional oil lamp fixed in the wall.

But Chauvelin knew his way well. Héron's lodgings gave on the second courtyard, the Square du Nazaret, and the way thither led past the main square tower, in the top floor of which the uncrowned King of France eked out his miserable existence as the plaything of a rough cobbler and his wife.

Just beneath its frowning bastions Chauvelin turned back towards Armand. He pointed with a careless hand upwards to the central tower.

"We have got little Capet in there," he said drily. "Your chivalrous Scarlet Pimpernel has not ventured in these precincts yet, you see."

Armand was silent. He had no difficulty in looking unconcerned; his thoughts were so full of Jeanne that he cared but little at this moment for any Bourbon king or for the destinies of France.

Now the two men reached the postern gate. A couple of sentinels were standing by, but the gate itself was open, and from within there came the sound of bustle and of noise, of a good deal of swearing, and also of loud laughter.

The guard-room gave on the left of the gate, and the laughter came from there. It was brilliantly lighted, and Armand, peering in, in the wake of Chauvelin, could see groups of soldiers sitting and standing about. There was a table in the centre of the room, and on it a number of jugs and pewter mugs, packets of cards, and overturned boxes of dice.

But the bustle did not come from the guard-room; it came from the landing and the stone stairs beyond.

Chauvelin, apparently curious, had passed through the gate, and Armand followed him. The light from the open door of the guard-room cut sharply across the landing, making the gloom beyond appear more dense and almost solid. From out the darkness, fitfully intersected by a lanthorn apparently carried to and fro, moving figures loomed out ghost-like and weirdly gigantic. Soon Armand distinguished a number of large objects that encumbered the landing, and as he and Chauvelin left the sharp light of the guard-room behind them, he could see that the large objects were pieces of furniture of every shape and size; a wooden bedstead—dismantled—leaned against the wall, a black horsehair sofa blocked the way to the tower stairs, and there were numberless chairs and several tables piled one on the top of the other.

In the midst of this litter a stout, flabby-cheeked man stood, apparently giving directions as to its removal to persons at present unseen.

"Holà, Papa Simon!" exclaimed Chauvelin jovially; "moving out to-day? What?"

"Yes, thank the Lord!—if there be a Lord!" retorted the other curtly. "Is that you, citizen Chauvelin?"

"In person, citizen. I did not know you were leaving quite so soon. Is citizen Héron anywhere about?"

"Just left," replied Simon. "He had a last look at Capet just before my wife locked the brat up in the inner room. Now he's gone back to his lodgings."

A man carrying a chest, empty of its drawers, on his back now came stumbling down the tower staircase. Madame Simon followed close on his heels, steadying the chest with one hand.

"We had better begin to load up the cart," she called to her husband in a high-pitched, querulous voice; "the corridor is getting too much encumbered."

She looked suspiciously at Chauvelin and Armand, and when she encountered the former's bland, unconcerned gaze she suddenly shivered and drew her black shawl closer round her shoulders.

"Bah!" she said, "I shall be glad to get out of this God-forsaken hole. I hate the very sight of these walls."

"Indeed, the citizeness does not look over robust in health," said Chauvelin with studied politeness. "The stay in the tower did not, mayhap, bring forth all the fruits of prosperity which she had anticipated."

The woman eyed him with dark suspicion lurking in her hollow eyes.

"I don't know what you mean, citizen," she said, with a shrug of her wide shoulders.

"Oh! I meant nothing," rejoined Chauvelin, smiling. "I am so interested in your removal; busy man as I am, it has amused me to watch you. Whom have you got to help you with the furniture?"

"Dupont, the man-of-all-work, from the concierge," said Simon curtly. "Citizen Héron would not allow anyone to come in from the outside."

"Rightly too. Have the new commissaries come yet?"

"Only citizen Cochefer. He is waiting upstairs for the others."

"And Capet?"

"He is all safe. Citizen Héron came to see him, and then he told me to lock the little vermin up in the inner room. Citizen Cochefer had just arrived by that time and he has remained in charge."

During all this while the man with the chest on his back was waiting for orders. Bent nearly double, he was grumbling audibly at his uncomfortable position.

"Does the citizen want to break my back?" he muttered. "We had best get along—quoi?"

He asked if he should begin to carry the furniture out into the street.

"Two sous have I got to pay every ten minutes to the lad who holds my nag," he said, muttering under his breath; "we shall be all night at this rate."

"Begin to load then," commanded Simon gruffly. "Here!—begin with this sofa."

"You'll have to give me a hand with that," said the man. "Wait a bit; I'll just see that everything is all right in the cart. I'll be back directly."

"Take something with you then as you go down," said Madame Simon in her querulous voice.

The man picked up a basket of linen that stood in the angle by the door. He hoisted it on his back and shuffled away with it across the landing and out through the gate.

"How did Capet like parting from his papa and maman?" asked Chauvelin with a laugh.

"H'm!" growled Simon laconically. "He will find out soon enough how well off he was under our care."

"When do you expect the other commissaries to arrive?"

"They will be here directly. But I shall not wait for them. Citizen Cochefer is upstairs mounting guard over Capet."

"Well, good-bye, Papa Simon," concluded Chauvelin jovially. "Citizeness, your servant!"

He bowed with unconcealed irony to the cobbler's wife, and nodded to Simon, who expressed by a volley of oaths his exact feelings with regard to all the agents of the Committee of General Security.

"Six months of this penal servitude have we had," he said roughly, "and no thanks or pension. I would as soon serve a ci-devant aristo as your accursed Committee."

The man Dupont had returned. Stolidly, after the fashion of his kind, he commenced the removal of citizen Simon's goods. He seemed a clumsy enough creature, and Simon and his wife had to do most of the work themselves.

Chauvelin watched the moving forms for a while, then he shrugged his shoulders with a laugh of indifference, and turned on his heel.

19

"IT IS ABOUT THE DAUPHIN"

HÉRON was not at his lodgings when, at last, after vigorous pulls at the bell, a great deal of waiting and much cursing, Chauvelin, closely followed by Armand, was introduced in the chief agent's office.

The soldier who acted as servant said that citizen Héron had gone out to sup, but would surely be home again by eight o'clock. Armand by this time was so dazed with fatigue that he sank on a chair like a log, and remained there staring into the fire, unconscious of the flight of time.

Anon Héron came home. He nodded to Chauvelin, and threw but a cursory glance on Armand.

"Five minutes, citizen," he said, with a rough attempt at an apology. "I am sorry to keep you waiting, but the new commissaries have arrived who are to take charge of Capet. The Simons have just gone, and I want to assure myself that everything is all right in the Tower. Cochefer has been in charge, but I like to cast an eye over the brat every day myself."

He went out again, slamming the door behind him. His heavy footsteps were heard treading the flagstones of the corridor, and gradually dying away in the distance. Armand had paid no heed either to his entrance or to his exit. He was only conscious of an intense weariness, and would at this moment gladly have laid his head on the scaffold if on it he could find rest.

A white-faced clock on the wall ticked off the seconds one by one. From the street below came the muffled sounds of wheeled traffic on the soft mud of the road; it was raining more heavily now, and from time to time a gust of wind rattled the small windows in their dilapidated frames, or hurled a shower of heavy drops against the panes.

The heat from the stove had made Armand drowsy; his head fell forward on his chest. Chauvelin, with his hands held behind his back, paced ceaselessly up and down the narrow room.

Suddenly Armand started—wide awake now. Hurried footsteps on the flagstones outside, a hoarse shout, a banging of heavy doors, and the next moment

Héron stood once more on the threshold of the room. Armand, with wide-open eyes, gazed on him in wonder. The whole appearance of the man had changed. He looked ten years older, with lank, dishevelled hair hanging matted over a moist forehead, the cheeks ashen-white, the full lips bloodless and hanging flabby and parted, displaying both rows of yellow teeth that shook against each other. The whole figure looked bowed, as if shrunk within itself.

Chauvelin had paused in his restless walk. He gazed on his colleague, a frown of puzzlement on his pale, set face.

"Capet!" he exclaimed, as soon as he had taken in every detail of Héron's altered appearance and seen the look of wild terror that literally distorted his face.

Héron could not speak; his teeth were chattering in his mouth, and his tongue seemed paralysed. Chauvelin went up to him. He was several inches shorter than his colleague, but at this moment he seemed to be towering over him like an avenging spirit. He placed a firm hand on the other's bowed shoulder.

"Capet has gone—is that it?" he queried peremptorily.

The look of terror increased in Héron's eyes, giving its mute reply.

"How? When?"

But for the moment the man was speechless. An almost maniacal fear seemed to hold him in its grip. With an impatient oath Chauvelin turned away from him.

"Brandy!" he said curtly, speaking to Armand.

A bottle and glass were found in the cupboard. It was St. Just who poured out the brandy and held it to Héron's lips. Chauvelin was once more pacing up and down the room in angry impatience.

"Pull yourself together, man," he said roughly after a while, "and try and tell me what has occurred."

Héron had sunk into a chair. He passed a trembling hand once or twice over his forehead.

"Capet has disappeared," he murmured; "he must have been spirited away while the Simons were moving their furniture. That accursed Cochefer was completely taken in."

Héron spoke in a toneless voice, hardly above a whisper, and like one whose throat is dry and mouth parched. But the brandy had revived him somewhat, and his eyes lost their former glassy look.

"How?" asked Chauvelin curtly.

"I was just leaving the tower when he arrived. I spoke to him at the door. I had seen Capet safely installed in the room, and gave orders to the woman Simon to let citizen Cochefer have a look at him too, and then to lock up the brat in the inner room and instal Cochefer in the antechamber on guard. I stood talking to Cochefer for a few moments in the antechamber. The woman Simon and the man-of-all-work, Dupont—whom I know well—were busy with the furniture. There could not have been anyone else concealed about the place—that I'll swear. Cochefer, after he took leave of me, went straight into the room; he found the woman Simon in the act of turning the key in the door of the inner chamber. 'I have locked Capet in there,' she said, giving the key to Cochefer; 'he will be quite safe until to-night, when the other commissaries come.' "

"Didn't Cochefer go into the room and ascertain whether the woman was lying?"

"Yes, he did! He made the woman re-open the door, and peeped in over her shoulder. She said the child was asleep. He vows that he saw the child lying fully dressed on a rug in the further corner of the room. The room, of course, was quite empty of furniture and only lighted by one candle, but there was the rug and the child asleep on it. Cochefer swears he saw him, and now—when I went up——"

"Well?"

"The commissaries were all there—Cochefer and Lasnière, Lorinet and Legrand. We went into the inner room, and I had a candle in my hand. We saw the child lying on the rug, just as Cochefer had seen him, and for a while we took no notice of it. Then some one—I think it was Lorinet—went to have a closer look at the brat. He took up the candle and went up to the rug. Then he gave a cry, and we all gathered round him. The sleeping child was only a bundle of hair and of clothes, a dummy—what?"

There was silence now in the narrow room, while the white-faced clock continued to tick off each succeeding second of time. Héron had once more buried his head in his hands; a trembling—like an attack of ague—shook his wide, bony shoulders. Armand had listened to the narrative with glowing eyes and a beating heart. The details which the two Terrorists here could not probably understand he had already added to the picture which his mind had conjured up.

He was back in thought now in the small lodging in the rear of St. Germain l'Auxerrois; Sir Andrew Ffoulkes was there, and my Lord Tony and Hastings, and a man was striding up and down the room, looking out into the great space beyond the river with the eyes of a seer, and a firm voice said abruptly:

"It is about the Dauphin!"

"Have you any suspicions?" asked Chauvelin now, pausing in his walk beside Héron, and once more placing a firm, peremptory hand on his colleague's shoulder.

"Suspicions!" exclaimed the chief agent with a loud oath. "Suspicions! Certainties, you mean. The man sat here but two days ago, in that very chair, and bragged of what he would do. I told him then that if he interfered with Capet I would wring his neck with my own hands."

And his long, talon-like fingers, with their sharp, grimy nails, closed and unclosed like those of feline creatures when they hold the coveted prey.

"Of whom do you speak?" queried Chauvelin curtly.

"Of whom? Of whom but that accursed de Batz? His pockets are bulging with Austrian money, with which, no doubt, he has bribed the Simons and Cochefer and the sentinels——"

"And Lorinet and Lasnière and you," interposed Chauvelin drily.

"It is false!" roared Héron, who already at the suggestion was foaming at the mouth and had jumped up from his chair, standing at bay as if prepared to fight for his life.

"False, is it?" retorted Chauvelin calmly; "then be not so quick, friend Héron, in slashing out with senseless denunciations right and left. You'll gain nothing by denouncing anyone just now. This is too intricate a matter to be dealt with with a sledge-hammer. Is anyone up in the tower at this moment?" he asked in quiet, business-like tones.

"Yes. Cochefer and the others are still there. They are making wild schemes to cover their treachery.

Cochefer is aware of his own danger, and Lasnière and the others know that they arrived at the Tower several hours too late. They are all at fault, and they know it. As for that de Batz," he continued with a voice rendered raucous with bitter passion, "I swore to him two days ago that he should not escape me if he meddled with Capet. I'm on his track already. I'll have him before the hour of midnight, and I'll torture him—yes! I'll torture him—the Tribunal shall give me leave. We have a dark cell down below here where my men know how to apply tortures worse than the rack—where they know just how to prolong life long enough to make it unendurable. I'll torture him! I'll torture him!"

But Chauvelin abruptly silenced the wretch with a curt command; then without another word he walked straight out of the room.

In thought Armand followed him. The wild desire was suddenly born in him to run away at this moment, while Héron, wrapped in his own meditations, was paying no heed to him. Chauvelin's footsteps had long ago died away in the distance; it was a long way to the upper floor of the tower, and some time would be spent, too, in interrogating the commissaries. This was Armand's opportunity. After all, if he were free himself he might more effectually help to rescue Jeanne. He knew, too, now where to join his leader. The corner of the street by the canal where Sir Andrew Ffoulkes would be waiting with the coal-cart; then there was the spinney on the road to St. Germain. Armand hoped that, with good luck, he might yet overtake his comrades, tell them of Jeanne's plight, and entreat them to work for her rescue.

He had forgotten that now he had no certificate of safety; that undoubtedly he would be stopped at the gates at this hour of the night; that his conduct proving suspect he would in all probability be detained, and, mayhap, be brought back to this self-same place within an hour. He had forgotten all that, for the primeval instinct for freedom had suddenly been aroused. He rose softly from his chair and crossed the room. Héron paid no attention to him. Now he had traversed the antechamber and unlatched the outer door.

Immediately a couple of bayonets were crossed in front of him, two more further on ahead scintillated feebly in the flickering light. Chauvelin had taken his precautions. There was no doubt that Armand St. Just was effectually a prisoner now.

With a sigh of disappointment he went back to his place beside the fire. Héron had not even moved whilst he had made this futile attempt at escape. Fifteen minutes later Chauvelin re-entered the room.

20

THE CERTIFICATE OF SAFETY

"You can leave de Batz and his gang alone, citizen Héron," said Chauvelin, as soon as he had closed the door behind him; "he had nothing to do with the escape of the Dauphin."

Héron growled out a few words of incredulity. But Chauvelin shrugged his shoulders and looked with unutterable contempt on his colleague. Armand, who was watching him closely, saw that in his hand he held a small piece of paper, which he had crushed into a shapeless mass.

"Do not waste your time, citizen," he said, "in raging against an empty wind-bag. Arrest de Batz if you like, or leave him alone an you please—we have nothing to fear from that braggart."

With nervous, slightly shaking fingers he set to work to smooth out the scrap of paper which he held. His hot hands had soiled it and pounded it until it was a mere rag and the writing on it illegible. But, such as it was, he threw it down with a blasphemous oath on the desk in front of Héron's eyes.

"It is that accursed Englishman who has been at work again," he said more calmly; "I guessed it the moment I heard your story. Set your whole army of sleuth-hounds on his track, citizen; you'll need them all."

Héron picked up the scrap of torn paper and tried to decipher the writing on it by the light from the lamp. He seemed almost dazed now with the awful catastrophe that had befallen him, and the fear that his own wretched life would have to pay the penalty for the disappearance of the child.

As for Armand—even in the midst of his own troubles, and of his own anxiety for Jeanne, he felt a proud exultation in his heart. The Scarlet Pimpernel had succeeded; Percy had not failed in his self-imposed undertaking. Chauvelin, whose piercing eyes were fixed on him at that moment, smiled with contemptuous irony.

"As you will find your hands overfull for the next few hours, citizen Héron," he said, speaking to his colleague and nodding in the direction of Armand, "I'll not trouble you with the voluntary confession this young citizen desired to make to you. All I need tell you is that he is an adherent of the Scarlet Pimpernel—I believe one of his most faithful, most trusted officers."

Héron roused himself from the maze of gloomy thoughts that were again paralysing his tongue. He turned bleary, wild eyes on Armand.

"We have got one of them, then?" he murmured incoherently, babbling like a drunken man.

"M'yes!" replied Chauvelin lightly; "but it is too late now for a formal denunciation and arrest. He cannot leave Paris, anyhow, and all that your men need to do is to keep a close watch on him. But I should send him home to-night if I were you."

Héron muttered something more, which, however, Armand did not understand. Chauvelin's words were still ringing in his ears. Was he, then, to be set free to-night? Free in a measure, of course, since spies were to be set to watch him—but free, neverthcless? He could not understand Chauvelin's attitude, and his own self-love was not a little wounded at the thought that he was of such little account that these men could afford to give him even this provisional freedom. And, of course, there was still Jeanne.

"I must, therefore, bid you good night, citizen," Chauvelin was saying in his bland, gently ironical manner. "You will be glad to return to your lodgings. As you see, the chief agent of the Committee of General Security is too much occupied just now to accept the sacrifice of your life which you were prepared so generously to offer him."

"I do not understand you, citizen," retorted Armand coldly, "nor do I desire indulgence at your hands. You have arrested an innocent woman on the trumped-up charge that she was harbouring me. I came here to-night to give myself up to justice so that she might be set free."

"But the hour is somewhat late, citizen," rejoined Chauvelin urbanely. "The lady in whom you take so fervent an interest is no doubt asleep in her cell at this hour. It would not be fitting to disturb her now. She might not find shelter before morning, and the weather is quite exceptionally unpropitious."

"Then, sir," said Armand, a little bewildered, "am I to understand that if I hold myself at your disposition Mademoiselle Lange will be set free as early to-morrow morning as may be?"

"No doubt, sir—no doubt," replied Chauvelin with more than his accustomed blandness; "if you will hold yourself entirely at our disposition, Mademoiselle Lange will be set free to-morrow. I think that we can safely promise that, citizen Héron, can we not?" he added, turning to his colleague.

But Héron, overcome with the stress of emotions, could only murmur vague, unintelligible words.

"Your word on that, citizen Chauvelin?" asked Armand.

"My word on it an you will accept it."

"No, I will not do that. Give me an unconditional certificate of safety and I will believe you."

"Of what use were that to you?" asked Chauvelin.

"I believe my capture to be of more importance to you than that of Mademoiselle Lange," said Armand quietly. "I will use the certificate of safety for myself or one of my friends if you break your word to me anent Mademoiselle Lange."

"H'm! the reasoning is not illogical, citizen," said Chauvelin, whilst a curious smile played round the corners of his thin lips. "You are quite right. You are a more valuable asset to us than the charming lady who, I hope, will for many a day and year to come delight pleasure-loving Paris with her talent and her grace."

"Amen to that, citizen," said Armand fervently.

"Well, it will all depend on you, sir! Here," he added, coolly turning over some papers on Héron's desk until he found what he wanted, "is an absolutely unconditional certificate of safety. The Committee of General Security issue very few of these. It is worth the cost of a human life. At no barrier or gate of any city can such a certificate be disregarded, nor even can it be detained. Allow me to hand it to you, citizen, as a pledge of my own good faith."

Smiling, urbane, with a curious look that almost expressed amusement lurking in his shrewd, pale eyes, Chauvelin handed the momentous document to Armand.

The young man studied it very carefully before he slipped it into the inner pocket of his coat.

"How soon shall I have news of Mademoiselle Lange?" he asked finally.

"In the course of to-morrow. I myself will call on you and redeem that precious document in person. You, on the other hand, will hold yourself at my disposition. That's understood, is it not?"

"I shall not fail you. My lodgings are——"

"Oh! do not trouble," interposed Chauvelin with a polite bow; "we can find that out for ourselves."

Héron had taken no part in this colloquy. Now that Armand prepared to go he made no attempt to detain him, or to question his colleague's actions. He sat by the table like a log; his mind was obviously a blank to all else save to his own terrors engendered by the events of this night.

With bleary, half-veiled eyes he followed Armand's progress through the room, and seemed unaware of the loud slamming of the outside door. Chauvelin escorted the young man past the first line of sentries, then he took cordial leave of him.

"Your certificate will, you will find, open every gate to you. Good night, citizen. À demain."

"Good night."

Armand's slim figure disappeared in the gloom. Chauvelin watched him for a few moments until even his footsteps had died away in the distance; then he turned back towards Héron's lodgings.

"À nous deux," he muttered between tightly-clenched teeth; "à nous deux once more, my enigmatical Scarlet Pimpernel."

21

BACK TO PARIS

It was an exceptionally dark night, and the rain was falling in torrents. Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, wrapped in a piece of sacking, had taken shelter right underneath the coal-cart; even then he was getting wet through to the skin.

He had worked hard for two days coal-heaving, and the night before he had found a cheap, squalid lodging where at any rate he was protected from the inclemencies of the weather; but to-night he was expecting Blakeney at the appointed hour and place. He had secured a cart of the ordinary ramshackle pattern used for carrying coal. Unfortunately there were no covered ones to be obtained in the neighbourhood, and equally unfortunately the thaw had set in with a blustering wind and driving rain, which made waiting in the open air for hours at a stretch and in complete darkness excessively unpleasant.

But for all these discomforts Sir Andrew Ffoulkes cared not one jot. In England, in his magnificent Suffolk home, he was a confirmed sybarite, in whose service every description of comfort and luxury had to be enrolled. Here to-night in the rough and tattered clothes of a coal-heaver, drenched to the skin, and crouching under the body of a cart that hardly sheltered him from the rain, he was as happy as a schoolboy out for a holiday.

Happy, but vaguely anxious.

He had no means of ascertaining the time. So many of the church bells and clock-towers had been silenced recently that not one of those welcome sounds penetrated to the dreary desolation of this canal wharf, with its abandoned carts standing ghostlike in a row. Darkness had set in very early in the afternoon, and the heavers had given up work soon after four o'clock.

For about an hour after that a certain animation had still reigned round the wharf, men crossing and going, one or two of the barges moving in or out alongside the quay. But for some time now darkness and silence had been the masters in this desolate spot, and that time had seemed to Sir Andrew an eternity. He had hobbled and tethered his horse, and stretched himself out at full length under the cart. Now and again he had crawled out from this uncomfortable shelter and walked up and down in ankle-deep mud, trying to restore circulation in his stiffened limbs; now and again a kind of torpor had come over him, and he had fallen into a brief and restless sleep. He would at this moment have given half his fortune for knowledge of the exact time.

But through all this weary waiting he was never for a moment in doubt. Unlike Armand St. Just, he had the simplest, most perfect faith in his chief. He had been Blakeney's constant companion in all these adventures for close upon four years now; the thought of failure, however vague, never once entered his mind.

He was only anxious for his chief's welfare. He knew that he would succeed, but he would have liked to have spared him much of the physical fatigue and the nerve-racking strain of these hours that lay between the daring deed and the hope of safety. Therefore he was conscious of an acute tingling of his nerves, which went on even during the brief snatches of fitful sleep, and through the numbness that invaded his whole body while the hours dragged wearily and slowly along.

Then, quite suddenly, he felt wakeful and alert; quite a while—even before he heard the welcome signal—he knew, with a curious, subtle sense of magnetism, that the hour had come, and that his chief was somewhere near by, not very far.

Then he heard the cry—a sea-mew's call—repeated thrice at intervals, and five minutes later something loomed out of the darkness quite close to the hind wheels of the cart.

"Hist! Ffoulkes!" came in a soft whisper, scarce louder than the wind.

"Present!" came in quick response.

"Here, help me to lift the child into the cart. He is asleep, and has been a dead weight on my arm for close on an hour now. Have you a dry bit of sacking or something to lay him on?"

"Not very dry, I am afraid."

With tender care the two men lifted the sleeping little King of France into the rickety cart. Blakeney laid his cloak over him, and listened for a while to the slow regular breathing of the child.

"St. Just is not here—you knew that?" said Sir Andrew after a while.

"Yes, I knew it," replied Blakeney curtly.

It was characteristic of these two men that not a word about the adventure itself, about the terrible risks and dangers of the past few hours, was exchanged between them. The child was here and was safe, and Blakeney knew the whereabouts of St. Just—that was enough for Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, the most devoted follower, the most perfect friend the Scarlet Pimpernel would ever know.

Ffoulkes now went to the horse, detached the nose-bag, and undid the nooses of the hobble and of the tether.

"Will you get in now, Blakeney?" he said; "we are ready."

And in unbroken silence they both got into the cart; Blakeney sitting on its floor beside the child, and Ffoulkes gathering the reins in his hands.

The wheels of the cart and the slow jog-trot of the horse made scarcely any noise in the mud of the roads; what noise they did make was effectually drowned by the soughing of the wind in the bare branches of the stunted acacia trees that edged the tow-path along the line of the canal.

Sir Andrew had studied the topography of this desolate neighbourhood well during the past twenty-four hours; he knew of a détour that would enable him to avoid the La Villette gate and the neighbourhood of the fortifications, and yet bring him out soon on the road leading to St. Germain.

Once he turned to ask Blakeney the time.

"It must be close on ten now," replied Sir Percy. "Push your nag along, old man. Tony and Hastings will be waiting for us."

It was very difficult to see clearly even a mètre or two ahead, but the road was a straight one, and the old nag seemed to know it almost as well and better than her driver. She shambled along at her own pace, covering the ground very slowly for Ffoulkes's burning impatience. Once or twice he had to get down and lead her over a rough piece of ground. They passed several groups of dismal, squalid houses, in some of which a dim light still burned, and as they skirted St. Ouen the church clock slowly tolled the hour of midnight.

But for the greater part of the way derelict, uncultivated spaces of *terres vagues* and a few isolated houses lay between the road and the fortifications of the city. The darkness of the night, the late hour, the soughing of the wind, were all in favour of the adventurers; and a coal-cart slowly trudging along in this neighbourhood, with two labourers sitting in it, was the least likely of any vehicle to attract attention.

Past Clichy, they had to cross the river by the rickety wooden bridge that was unsafe even in broad daylight. They were not far from their destination now. Half a dozen kilometres further on they would be leaving Courbevoie on their left, and then the sign-post would come in sight. After that the spinney just off the road, and the welcome presence of Tony, Hastings, and the horses. Ffoulkes got down in order to make sure of the way. He walked at the horse's head now, fearful lest he should miss the cross-roads and the sign-post.

The horse was getting over-tired; it had covered fifteen kilometres, and it was close on three o'clock of Monday morning.

Another hour went by in absolute silence. Ffoulkes and Blakeney took turns at the horse's head. Then at last they reached the cross-roads; even through the darkness the sign-post showed white against the surrounding gloom.

"This looks like it," murmured Sir Andrew. He turned the horse's head sharply towards the left, down a narrower road, and leaving the sign-post behind him, he walked slowly along for another quarter of an hour; then Blakeney called a halt.

"The spinney must be sharp on our right now," he said.

He got down from the cart, and while Ffoulkes remained beside the horse, he plunged into the gloom. A moment later the cry of the sea-mew rang out three times into the air. It was answered almost immediately.

The spinney lay on the right of the road. Soon the soft sounds that to a trained ear invariably betray the presence of a number of horses reached Ffoulkes's straining senses. He took his old nag out of the shafts, and the shabby harness from off her, then he turned her out on the piece of waste land that faced the spinney. Some one would find her in the morning, her and the cart with the shabby harness laid in it, and, having wondered if all these things had perchance dropped down from heaven, would quietly appropriate them, and mayhap thank much-maligned heaven for its gift.

Blakeney in the meanwhile had lifted the sleeping child out of the cart. Then he called to Sir Andrew and led the way across the road and into the spinney.

Five minutes later Hastings received the uncrowned King of France in his arms.

Unlike Ffoulkes, my Lord Tony wanted to hear all about the adventure of this afternoon. A thorough sportsman, he loved a good story of hairbreadth escapes, of dangers cleverly avoided, risks taken and conquered.

"Just in ten words, Blakeney," he urged entreatingly; "how did you actually get the boy away?"

Sir Percy laughed—despite himself—at the young man's eagerness.

"Next time we meet, Tony," he begged; "I am so demmed fatigued,and there's this beastly rain——"

"No, no—now! while Hastings sees to the horses. I could not exist long without knowing, and we are well sheltered from the rain under this tree."

"Well, then, since you will have it," began Blakeney with a laugh, which despite the weariness and anxiety of the past twenty-four hours had forced itself to his lips, "I have been sweeper and man-of-all-work at the Temple for the past few weeks, you must know——"

"No!" ejaculated my Lord Tony lustily. "By gum!"

"Indeed, you old sybarite, whilst you were enjoying yourself heaving coal on the canal wharf, I was scrubbing floors, lighting fires, and doing a number of odd jobs for a lot of demmed murdering villains, and"—he added under his breath—"incidentally, too, for our league. Whenever I had an hour or two off duty I spent them in my lodgings, and asked you all to come and meet me there."

"By Gad, Blakeney! Then the day before yesterday?—when we all met——"

"I had just had a bath—sorely needed, I can tell you. I had been cleaning boots half the day, but I had heard that the Simons were removing from the Temple on the Sunday, and had obtained an order from them to help them shift their furniture."

"Cleaning boots!" murmured my Lord Tony with a chuckle. "Well! and then?"

"Well, then everything worked out splendidly.

You see by that time I was a well-known figure in the Temple. Héron knew me well. I used to be his lanthorn-bearer when at nights he visited that poor mite in his prison. It was 'Dupont here! Dupont there!' all day long. 'Light the fire in the office, Dupont! Dupont, brush my coat! Dupont, fetch me a light!' When the Simons wanted to move their household goods they called loudly for Dupont. I got a covered laundry-cart, and I brought a dummy with me to substitute for the child. Simon himself knew nothing of this, but Madame was in my pay. The dummy was just splendid, with real hair on its head; Madame helped me to substitute it for the child; we laid it on the sofa and covered it over with a rug, even while those brutes Héron and Cochefer were on the landing outside, and we stuffed His Majesty the King of France into a linen-basket. The room was badly lighted and anyone would have been deceived. No one was suspicious of that type of trickery, so it went off perfectly. I moved the furniture of the Simons out of the tower. His Majesty King Louis XVII. was still concealed in the linen basket. I drove the Simons to their new lodgings—the man still suspects nothing, and there I helped them to unload the furniture—with the exception of the linen-basket, of course. After that I drove my laundry cart to a house I knew of, and collected a number of linen-baskets, which I had arranged should be in readiness for me. Thus loaded up I left Paris by the Vincennes gate, and drove as far as Bagnolet where there is no road except past the octroi, where the officials might have proved unpleasant. So I lifted His Majesty out of the basket and we walked on hand in hand in the darkness and the rain until the poor little feet gave out. Then the little fellow—who has been wonderfully plucky throughout, indeed, more a Capet than a Bourbon—snuggled up in my arms and went fast asleep, and—and—well, I think that's all, for here we are, you see."

"But if Madame Simon had not been amenable to bribery?" suggested Lord Tony after a moment's silence.

"Then I should have had to think of something else."

"If during the removal of the furniture Héron had remained resolutely in the room?"

"Then, again, I should have had to think of something else; but remember that in life there is always one supreme moment when Chance—who is credited to have but one hair on her head—stands by you for a brief space of time, sometimes that space is infinitesimal—one minute, a few seconds—just the time to seize Chance by that one hair. So I pray you all give me no credit in this or any other matter in which we all work together, but the quickness of seizing Chance by the hair during the brief moment when she stands by my side. If Madame Simon had been unamenable, if Héron had remained in the room all the time, if Cochefer had had two looks at the dummy instead of one—well, then, something else would have helped me, something would have occurred; something—I know not what—but surely something which Chance meant to be on our side, if only we were quick enough to seize it—and so you see how simple it all is."

So simple, in fact, that it was sublime. The daring, the pluck, the ingenuity, and, above all, the superhuman heroism and endurance which rendered the hearers of this simple narrative, simply told, dumb with admiration.

Their thoughts now were beyond verbal expression.

"How soon was the hue and cry for the child about the streets?" asked Tony after a moment's silence.

"It was not out when I left the gates of Paris," said Blakeney meditatively; "so quietly has the news of the escape been kept, that I am wondering what devilry that brute Héron can be after. And now no more chattering," he continued lightly; "all to horse, and you, Hastings, have a care. The destinies of France, mayhap, will be lying asleep in your arms."

"But you, Blakeney?" exclaimed the three men almost simultaneously.

"I am not going with you. I entrust the child to you. For God's sake guard him well! Ride with him to Mantes. You should arrive there about ten o'clock. One of you then go straight to No. 9 Rue la Tour. Ring the bell; an old man will answer it. Say the one word to him, 'Enfant'; he will reply, 'De roi!' Give him the child, and may Heaven bless you for all the help you have given me this night!"

"But you, Blakeney?" reiterated Tony with a note of deep anxiety in his fresh young voice.

"I am straight for Paris," he said quietly.

"Impossible!"

"Therefore feasible."

"But why? Percy, in the name of Heaven, do you realize what you are doing?"

"Perfectly."

"They'll not leave a stone unturned to find you—they know by now, believe me, that your hand did this trick."

"I know that."

"And yet you mean to go back?"

"And yet I am going back."

"Blakeney!"

"It's no use, Tony. Armand is in Paris. I saw him in the corridor of the Temple Prison in the company of Chauvelin."

"Great God!" exclaimed Lord Hastings.

The others were silent. What was the use of arguing? One of themselves was in danger. Armand St. Just, the brother of Marguerite Blakeney! Was it likely that Percy would leave him in the lurch?

"One of us will stay with you, of course?" asked Sir Andrew after a while.

"Yes! I want Hastings and Tony to take the child to Mantes, then to make all possible haste for Calais, and there to keep in close touch with the *Day Dream*; the skipper will contrive to open communication. Tell him to remain in Calais waters. I hope I may have need of him soon. And now to horse, both of you," he added gaily. "Hastings, when you are ready, I will hand up the child to you. He will be quite safe on the pillion with a strap round him and you."

Nothing more was said after that. The orders were given, there was nothing to do but to obey; and the uncrowned King of France was not yet out of danger. Hastings and Tony led two of the horses out of the spinney; at the roadside they mounted, and then the little lad for whose sake so much heroism, such selfless devotion had been expended, was hoisted up, still half asleep, on the pillion in front of my Lord Hastings.

"Keep your arm round him," admonished Blakeney; "your horse looks quiet enough. But put on speed as far as Mantes, and may Heaven guard you both!"

The two men pressed their heels to their horses' flanks, the beasts snorted and pawed the ground anxious to start. There were a few whispered farewells, two loyal hands were stretched out at the last, eager to grasp the leader's hand.

Then horses and riders disappeared in the utter darkness which comes before the dawn.

Blakeney and Ffoulkes stood side by side in silence for as long as the pawing of hoofs in the mud could reach their ears, then Ffoulkes asked abruptly:

"What do you want me to do, Blakeney?"

"Well, for the present, my dear fellow, I want you to take one of the three horses we have left in the spinney and put him into the shafts of our old friend the coal-cart; then I am afraid that you must go back by the way we came."

"Yes?"

"Continue to heave coal on the canal wharf by La Villette; it is the best way to avoid attention. After your day's work keep your cart and horse in readiness against my arrival, at the same spot where you were last night. If after having waited for me like this for three consecutive nights you neither see nor hear anything from me, go back to England and tell Marguerite that in giving my life for her brother I gave it for her!"

"Blakeney——!"

"I spoke differently to what I usually do, is that it?" he interposed, placing his firm hand on his friend's shoulder. "I am degenerating, Ffoulkes—that's what it is. Pay no heed to it. I suppose that carrying that sleeping child in my arms last night softened some nerves in my body. I was so infinitely sorry for the poor mite, and vaguely wondered if I had not saved it from one misery only to plunge it in another.

There was such a fateful look on that wan little face, as if destiny had already writ its veto there against happiness. It came on me then how futile were our actions, if God chooses to interpose His will between us and our desires."

Almost as he left off speaking the rain ceased to patter down against the puddles in the road. Overhead the clouds flew by at terrific speed, driven along by the blustering wind. It was less dark now, and Sir Andrew, peering through the gloom could see his leader's face. It was singularly pale and hard, and the deep-set lazy eyes had in them just that fateful look which he himself had spoken of just now.

"You are anxious about Armand, Percy?" asked Ffoulkes softly.

"Yes. He should have trusted me, as I had trusted him. He missed me at the Villette gate on Friday, and without a thought left me—left us all in the lurch; he threw himself into the lion's jaws, thinking that he could help the girl he loved. I knew that I could save her. She is in comparative safety even now. The old woman, Madame Belhomme, was released the day after her arrest, and Jeanne Lange is in a house in the Rue St. Germain l'Auxerrois, close to my own lodgings. I got her there early this morning. It was easy for me, of course: 'Holà, Dupont! my boots, Dupont!' 'One moment, citizen; my daughter——' 'Curse thy daughter; bring me my boots!' and Jeanne Lange walked out of the Temple Prison, her hand in that of that lout Dupont."

"But Armand does not know that she is in safety?"

"No. I have not seen him since that early morning on Saturday when he came to tell me that she had been arrested. Having sworn that he would obey me, he went to meet you and Tony at La Villette, but returned to Paris a few hours later, and drew the undivided attention of all the committees on Jeanne Lange by his senseless, foolish inquiries. But for his action throughout the whole of yesterday I could have smuggled Jeanne out of Paris, got her to join you at Villette, or Hastings in St. Germain. But the barriers were being closely watched for her, and I had the Dauphin to think of. She is in comparative safety; the people in the Rue St. Germain l'Auxerrois are friendly for the moment; but for how long? Who knows? I must look after her of course. And Armand! Poor old Armand! The lion's jaws have snapped over him and they hold him tight. Chauvelin and his gang are using him as a decoy to trap me, of course. All that had not happened if Armand had trusted me."

He uttered a quick sigh of impatience, almost of regret. Ffoulkes was the one man who could guess the bitter disappointment that this had meant. Percy had longed to be back in England soon, back to Marguerite, to a few days of unalloyed happiness and a few days of peace.

Now Armand's actions had retarded all that; they were a deliberate bar to the future as it had been mapped out by a man who foresaw everything, who was prepared for every eventuality.

In this case, too, he had been prepared, but not for want of trust which had brought on disobedience akin to disloyalty. That absolutely unforeseen eventuality had changed Blakeney's usual irresponsible gaiety into a consciousness of the inevitable, of the inexorable decrees of Fate.

With an anxious sigh Sir Andrew turned away from his chief and went back to the spinney to select for his own purpose one of the three horses which Hastings and Tony had unavoidably left behind.

"And you, Blakeney—how will you go back to that awful Paris?" he said, when he had made his choice and was once more back beside Percy.

"I don't know yet," replied Blakeney; "but it would not be safe to ride. I'll reach one of the gates on this side of the city and contrive to slip in somehow. I have a certificate of safety in my pocket in case I need it."

"We'll leave the horses here," he said presently, whilst he was helping Sir Andrew to put the horse in the shafts of the coal-cart; "they cannot come to much harm. Some poor devil might steal them, in order to escape from those vile brutes in the city. If so, God speed him, say I. I'll compensate my friend the farmer of St. Germain for their loss at an early opportunity. And now, good-bye, my dear fellow! Some time to-night, if possible, you shall hear direct news of me—if not, then to-morrow or the day after that. Good-bye, and Heaven guard you!"

"God guard you, Blakeney!" said Sir Andrew fervently.

He jumped into the cart and gathered up the reins. His heart was heavy as lead, and a strange mist had gathered in his eyes, blurring the last dim vision which he had of his chief standing all alone in the gloom, his broad, magnificent figure looking almost weirdly erect and defiant, his head thrown back, and his kind, lazy eyes watching the final departure of his most faithful comrade and friend.

22

OF THAT THERE COULD BE NO QUESTION

Blakeney had more than one *pied-à-terre* in Paris, and never stayed longer than two or three days in any of these. It was not difficult for a single man, were he labourer or *bourgeoise*, to obtain a night's lodging, even in these most troublous times, and in any quarter of Paris, provided the rent—out of all proportion to the comfort and accommodation given—was paid ungrudgingly and in advance.

Emigration and, above all, the enormous death-roll of the past eighteen months, had emptied the apartment-houses of the great city, and those who had rooms to let were only too glad of a lodger, always providing they were not in danger of being worried by the committees of their section.

The laws framed by these same committees now demanded that all keepers of lodging- or apartment-houses should within twenty-four hours give notice at the bureau of their individual sections of the advent of new lodgers, together with a description of the personal appearance of such lodgers, and an indication of their presumed civil status and occupation. But there was a margin of twenty-four hours, which could on pressure be extended to forty-eight, and, therefore, anyone could obtain shelter for forty-eight hours, and have no questions asked, provided he or she was willing to pay the exorbitant sum usually asked under the circumstances.

Thus Blakeney had no difficulty in securing what lodgings he wanted when he once more found himself inside Paris at somewhere about noon of that same Monday.

The thought of Hastings and Tony speeding on towards Mantes with the royal child safely held in Hastings' arms had kept his spirits buoyant and caused him for a while to forget the terrible peril in which Armand St. Just's thoughtless egoism had placed them both.

Blakeney was a man of abnormal physique and iron nerve, else he could never have endured the fatigues of the past twenty-four hours, from the moment when on the Sunday afternoon he began to play his part of furniture-remover at the Temple, to that when at last on Monday at noon he succeeded in persuading the sergeant at the Maillot gate that he was an honest stonemason residing at Neuilly, who was come to Paris in search of work.

After that matters became more simple. Terribly footsore, though he would never have admitted it, hungry and weary, he turned into an unpretentious eating-house and ordered some dinner. The place when he entered was occupied mostly by labourers and workmen, dressed very much as he was himself, and quite as grimy as he had become after having driven about for hours in a laundry-cart and in a coal-cart, and having walked twelve kilometres, some of which he had covered whilst carrying a sleeping child in his arms.

Thus, Sir Percy Blakeney, Bart., the friend and companion of the Prince of Wales, the most fastidious fop the *salons* of London and Bath had ever seen, was in no way distinguishable outwardly from the tattered, half-starved, dirty, and out-at-elbows products of this fraternizing and equalizing Republic.

He was so hungry that the ill-cooked, badly-served meal tempted him to eat; and he ate on in silence, seemingly more interested in boiled beef than in the conversation that went on around him. But he would not have been the keen and daring adventurer that he was if he did not all the while keep his ears open for any fragment of news that the desultory talk of his fellow-diners was likely to yield to him.

Politics were, of course, discussed; the tyranny of the sections, the slavery that this free Republic had brought on its citizens. The names of the chief personages of the day were all mentioned in turns: Foucquier-Tinville, Santerre, Danton, Robespierre. Héron and his sleuth-hounds were spoken of with execrations quickly suppressed, but of little Capet not one word.

Blakeney could not help but infer that Chauvelin, Héron and the commissaries in charge were keeping the escape of the child a secret for as long as they could.

He could hear nothing of Armand's fate, of course. The arrest—if arrest there had been—was not likely to be bruited abroad just now. Blakeney having last seen Armand in Chauvelin's company, whilst he himself was moving the Simons' furniture, could not for a moment doubt that the young man was imprisoned—unless, indeed, he was being allowed a certain measure of freedom, whilst his every step was being spied on, so that he might act as a decoy for his chief.

At thought of that all weariness seemed to vanish from Blakeney's powerful frame. He set his lips firmly together, and once again the light of irresponsible gaiety danced in his eyes.

He had been in as tight a corner as this before now; at Boulogne his beautiful Marguerite had been used as a decoy, and twenty-four hours later he had held her in his arms on board his yacht the *Day Dream*. As he would have put it in his own forcible language:

"Those d——d murderers have not got me yet."

The battle mayhap would this time be against greater odds than before, but Blakeney had no fear that they would prove overwhelming.

There was in life but one odd that was overwhelming, and that was treachery.

But of that there could be no question.

In the afternoon Blakeney started off in search of lodgings for the night. He found what would suit him in the Rue de l'Arcade, which was equally far from the house of Justice as it was from his former lodgings. Here he would be safe for at least twenty-four hours, after which he might have to shift again. But for the moment the landlord of the miserable apartment was over-willing to make no fuss and ask no questions, for the sake of the money which this aristo in disguise dispensed with a lavish hand.

Having taken possession of his new quarters and snatched a few hours of sound, well-deserved rest, until the time when the shades of evening and the darkness of the streets would make progress through the city somewhat more safe, Blakeney sallied forth at about six o'clock, having a threefold object in view.

Primarily, of course, the threefold object was concentrated on Armand. There was the possibility of finding out at the young man's lodgings in Montmartre what had become of him; then there were the usual inquiries that could be made from the registers of the various prisons; and, thirdly, there was the chance that Armand had succeeded in sending some kind of message to Blakeney's former lodgings in the Rue St. Germain l'Auxerrois.

On the whole, Sir Percy decided to leave the prison registers alone for the present. If Armand had been actually arrested, he would almost certainly be confined in the Châtelet Prison, where he would be closer to hand for all the interrogatories to which, no doubt, he would be subjected.

Blakeney set his teeth and murmured a good, sound, British oath when he thought of those interrogatories. Armand St. Just, highly strung, a dreamer and a bundle of nerves—how he would suffer under the mental rack of questions and cross-questions, cleverly-laid traps to catch information from him unawares!

His next objective, then, was Armand's former lodging, and from six o'clock until close upon eight Sir Percy haunted the slopes of Montmartre, and more especially the neighbourhood of the Rue de la Croix Blanche, where Armand St. Just had lodged. At the house itself he could not inquire as yet; obviously it would not have been safe; to-morrow, perhaps, when he knew more, but not to-night. His keen eyes had already spied at least two figures clothed in the rags of out-of-work labourers like himself, who had hung with suspicious persistence in this same neighbourhood, and who during the two hours that he had been watching had never strayed out of sight of the house in the Rue de la Croix Blanche.

That these were two spies on the watch was, of course, obvious; but whether they were on the watch for St. Just or for some other unfortunate wretch it was at this stage impossible to conjecture.

Then, as from the Tour des Dames close by the clock solemnly struck the hour of eight, and Blakeney prepared to wend his way back to another part of the city, he suddenly saw Armand walking slowly up the street.

The young man did not look either to right or left; he held his head forward on his chest, and his hands were hidden underneath his cloak. When he passed immediately under one of the street lamps Blakeney caught sight of his face; it was pale and drawn. Then he turned his head, and for the space of two seconds his eyes across the narrow street encountered those of his chief. He had the presence of mind not to make a sign or to utter a sound; he was obviously being followed, but in that brief moment Sir Percy had seen in the young man's eyes a look that reminded him of a hunted creature.

"What have those brutes been up to with him, I wonder?" he muttered between clenched teeth.

Armand soon disappeared under the doorway of the same house where he had been lodging all along. Even as he did so Blakeney saw the two spies gather together like a pair of slimy lizards, and whisper excitedly one to another. A third man, who obviously had been dogging Armand's footsteps, came up and joined them after a while.

Blakeney could have sworn loudly and lustily, had it been possible to do so without attracting attention. The whole of Armand's history in the past twenty-four hours was perfectly clear to him. The young man had been made free that he might prove a decoy for more important game.

His every step was being watched, and he still thought Jeanne Lange in immediate danger of death. The look of despair in his face proclaimed these two facts, and Blakeney's heart ached for the mental torture which his friend was enduring. He longed to let Armand know that the woman he loved was in comparative safety.

Jeanne Lange first, and then Armand himself; and the odds would be very heavy against the Scarlet Pimpernel! But that Marguerite should not have to mourn an only brother, of that Sir Percy made oath.

He now turned his steps towards his own former lodgings by St. Germain l'Auxerrois. It was just possible that Armand had succeeded in leaving a message there for him. It was, of course, equally possible that when he did so Héron's men had watched his movements, and that spies would be stationed there, too, on the watch.

But that risk must, of course, be run. Blakeney's former lodging was the one place that Armand would know of to which he could send a message to his chief, if he wanted to do so. Of course, the unfortunate young man could not have known until just now that Percy would come back to Paris, but he might guess it, or wish it, or only vaguely hope for it; he might want to send a message, he might long to communicate with his brother-in-law and, perhaps, feel sure that the latter would not leave him in the lurch.

With that thought in his mind, Sir Percy was not likely to give up the attempt to ascertain for himself whether Armand had tried to communicate with him or not. As for spies—well, he had dodged some of them often enough in his time—the risks that he ran to-night were no worse than the ones to which he had so successfully run counter in the Temple yesterday.

Still keeping up the slouching gait peculiar to the out-at-elbows working man of the day, hugging the houses as he walked along the streets, Blakeney made slow progress across the city. But at last he reached the façade of St. Germain l'Auxerrois, and turning sharply to his right he soon came in sight of the house which he had only quitted twenty-four hours previously.

We all know that house—all of us who are familiar with the Paris of those terrible days. It stands—quite detached—a vast quadrangle, facing the Quai de l'Ecole and the river, backing on the Rue St. Germain l'Auxerrois, and shouldering the Carrefour des Trois Maries. The *porte-cochère*, so-called, is but a narrow doorway, and is actually situated in the Rue St. Germain l'Auxerrois.

Blakeney made his way cautiously right round the house; he peered up and down the quay, and his keen eyes tried to pierce the dense gloom that hung at the corners of the Pont Neuf immediately opposite. Soon he assured himself that for the present, at any rate, the house was not being watched.

Armand presumably had not yet left a message for him here; but he might do so at any time now that he knew that his chief was in Paris and on the look-out for him.

Blakeney made up his mind to keep this house in sight. This art of watching he had acquired to a masterly extent, and could have taught Héron's watch-dogs a remarkable lesson in it. At night, of course, it was a comparatively easy task. There were a good many unlighted doorways along the quay, whilst a street lamp was fixed on a bracket in the wall of the very house which he kept in observation.

Finding temporary shelter under various doorways, or against the dank walls of the houses, Blakeney set himself resolutely to a few hours' weary waiting. A thin, drizzling rain fell with unpleasant persistence, like a damp mist, and the thin blouse which he wore soon became wet through and clung hard and chilly to his shoulders.

It was close on midnight when at last he thought it best to give up his watch and to go back to his lodgings for a few hours' sleep; but at seven o'clock the next morning he was back again at his post.

The *porte-cochère* of his former lodging-house was not yet open; he took up his stand close beside it. His woollen cap pulled well over his forehead, the grime cleverly plastered on his hair and face, his lower jaw thrust forward, his eyes looking lifeless and bleary, all gave him an expression of sly villainy, whilst the short clay pipe stuck at a sharp angle in his mouth, his hands thrust into the pockets of his ragged breeches, and his bare feet in the mud of the road, gave the final touch to his representation of an out-of-work, ill-conditioned, and supremely discontented loafer.

He had not very long to wait. Soon the *porte-cochère* of the house was opened, and the concierge came out with his broom, making a show of cleaning the pavement in front of the door. Five minutes later a lad, whose clothes consisted entirely of rags, and whose feet and head were bare, came rapidly up the street from the quay, and walked along looking at the houses as he went, as if trying to decipher their number. The cold grey dawn was just breaking, dreary and damp, as all the past days had been. Blakeney watched the lad as he approached, the small, naked feet falling noiselessly on the cobble-stones of the road. When the boy was quite close to him and to the house, Blakeney shifted his position and took the pipe out of his mouth.

"Up early, my son!" he said gruffly.

"Yes," said the pale-faced little creature; "I have a message to deliver at No. 9 Rue St. Germain l'Auxerrois. It must be somewhere near here."

"It is. You can give me the message."

"Oh, no, citizen!" said the lad, into whose pale, circled eyes a look of terror had quickly appeared. "It is for one of the lodgers in No. 9. I must give it to him."

With an instinct which he somehow felt could not err at this moment, Blakeney knew that the message was one from Armand to himself, a written message, too, since—instinctively when he spoke—the boy had clutched at his thin shirt, as if trying to guard something precious that had been entrusted to him.

"I will deliver the message myself, sonny," said Blakeney gruffly, "I know the citizen for whom it is intended. He would not like the concierge to see it."

"Oh! I would not give it to the concierge," said the boy. "I would take it upstairs myself."

"My son," retorted Blakeney, "let me tell you this. You are going to give that message up to me and I will put five whole livres into your hand."

Blakeney, with all his sympathy aroused for this poor pale-faced lad, put on the airs of a ruffianly bully. He did not wish that message to be taken indoors by the lad, for the concierge might get hold of it, despite the boy's protests and tears, and after that Blakeney would perforce have to disclose himself before it would be given up to him. During the past week the concierge had been very amenable to bribery. Whatever suspicions he had had about his lodger he had kept to himself for the sake of the money which he received; but it was impossible to gauge any man's trend of thought these days from one hour to the next. Something—for aught Blakeney knew—might have occurred in the past twenty-four hours to change an amiable and accommodating lodging-house keeper into a surly or dangerous spy.

Fortunately, the concierge had once more gone within; there was no one abroad, and if there were, no one probably would take any notice of a burly ruffian brow-beating a child.

"Allons!" he said gruffly, "give me the letter, or that five livres goes back into my pocket."

"Five livres!" exclaimed the child with pathetic eagerness. "Oh, citizen!"

The thin little hand fumbled under the rags, but it reappeared again empty, whilst a faint blush spread over the hollow cheeks.

"The other citizen also gave me five livres," he said humbly. "He lodges in the house where my mother is concierge. It is in the Rue de la Croix Blanche. He has been very kind to my mother. I would rather do as he bade me."

"Bless the lad," murmured Blakeney under his breath; "his loyalty redeems many a crime of this God-forsaken city. Now I suppose I shall have to bully him, after all."

He took his hand out of his breeches pocket; between two very dirty fingers he held a piece of gold. The other hand he placed quite roughly on the lad's chest.

"Give me the letter," he said harshly, "or——"

He pulled at the ragged blouse, and a scrap of soiled paper soon fell into his hand. The lad began to cry.

"Here," said Blakeney, thrusting the piece of gold into the thin, small palm, "take this home to your mother and tell your lodger that a big, rough man took the letter away from you by force. Now run, before I kick you out of the way."

The lad, terrified out of his poor wits, did not wait for further commands; he took to his heels and ran, his small hand clutching the piece of gold. Soon he had disappeared round the corner of the street.

Blakeney did not at once read the paper; he thrust it quickly into his breeches pockets and slouched away slowly down the street, and thence across the Place du Carrousel, in the direction of his new lodgings in the Rue de l'Arcade.

It was only when he found himself alone in the narrow, squalid room which he was occupying that he took the scrap of paper from his pocket and read it slowly through. It said:

Percy, you cannot forgive me, nor can I ever forgive myself, but if you only knew what I have suffered for the past two days you would, I think, try and forgive. I am free and yet a prisoner; my every footstep is dogged. What they ultimately mean to do with me I do not know. And when I think of Jeanne I long for the power to end my own miserable existence. Percy! she is still in the hands of those fiends . . . I saw the prison register; her name written there has been like a burning brand on my heart ever since. She was still in prison the day that you left Paris; to-morrow, to-night, mayhap, they will try her, condemn her, torture her, and I dare not go to see you, for I would only be bringing spies to your door. But will you come to me, Percy? It should be safe in the hours of the night, and the concierge is devoted to me. To-night at ten o'clock she will leave the porte-cochère unlatched. If you find it so, and if on the ledge of the window immediately on your left as you enter you find a candle alight, and beside it a scrap of paper with your initials S. P. traced on it, then it will be quite safe for you to come up to my room. It is on the second landing—a door on your right—that too I will leave on the latch. But in the name of the woman you love best in all the world come at once to me then, and bear in mind, Percy, that the woman I love is threatened with immediate death, and that I am powerless to save her. Indeed, believe me, I would gladly die even now but for the thought of Jeanne, whom I should be leaving in the hands of those fiends. For God's sake, Percy, remember that Jeanne is all the world to me.

"Poor old Armand," murmured Blakeney, with a kindly smile directed at the absent friend, "he won't trust me even now. He won't trust his Jeanne in my hands. Well," he added after a while, "after all I would not entrust Marguerite to anybody else either."

23

THE OVERWHELMING ODDS

At half-past ten that same evening, Blakeney, still clad in a workman's tattered clothes, his feet bare so that he could tread the streets unheard, turned into the Rue de la Croix Blanche.

The *porte-cochère* of the house where Armand lodged had been left on the latch; not a soul was in sight. Peering cautiously round, he slipped into the house. On the ledge of the window, immediately on his left when he entered, a candle was left burning, and beside it there was a scrap of paper with the initials S. P. roughly traced in pencil. No one challenged him as he noiselessly glided past it, and up the narrow stairs that led to the upper floor. Here, too, on the second landing the door on the right had been left on the latch. He pushed it open and entered.

As is usual even in the meanest lodgings in Paris houses, a small antechamber lay between the front door and the main room. When Percy entered, the antechamber was unlighted, but the door into the inner room beyond was ajar. Blakeney approached it with noiseless tread, and gently pushed it open.

That very instant he knew that the game was up; he heard the footsteps closing up behind him, saw Armand, deathly pale, leaning against the wall in the room in front of him, and Chauvelin and Héron standing guard over him.

The next moment the room and the antechamber were literally alive with soldiers—twenty of them to arrest one man.

It was characteristic of that man that when hands were laid on him from every side he threw back his head and laughed—laughed mirthfully, lightheartedly, and the first words that escaped his lips were:

"Well, I am d——d!"

"The odds are against you, Sir Percy," said Chauvelin to him in English, whilst Héron at the further end of the room was growling like a contented beast.

"By the Lord, sir," said Sir Percy with perfect *sang-froid*, "I do believe that for the moment they are."

"Have done, my men—have done!" he added, turning good-humouredly to the soldiers round him.

"I never fight against overwhelming odds. Twenty to one, eh? I could lay four of you out easily enough, perhaps even six, but what then?"

But a kind of savage lust seemed to have rendered these men temporarily mad, and they were being egged on by Héron. The mysterious Englishman, about whom so many eerie tales were told! Well, he had supernatural powers, and twenty to one might be nothing to him if the devil was on his side. Therefore a blow on his forearm with the butt-end of a musket was useful for disabling his right hand, and soon the left arm with a dislocated shoulder hung limp by his side. Then he was bound with cords.

The vein of luck had given out. The gambler had staked more than usual and had lost; but he knew how to lose, just as he had always known how to win.

"Those d——d brutes are trussing me like a fowl," he murmured with irrepressible gaiety at the last.

Then the wrench on his bruised arms as they were pulled roughly back by the cords caused the veil of unconsciousness to gather over his eyes.

"And Jeanne was safe, Armand," he shouted with a last desperate effort; "those devils have lied to you . . . and tricked you into this. . . . Since Sunday she is out of prison . . . in the house . . . you know. . . ."

After that he lost consciousness.

And this occurred on Tuesday, January 21st, in the year 1794, or, in accordance with the new calendar, on the 2nd Pluviôse, in the second year of the Republic.

It is chronicled in the *Moniteur* of the 3rd Pluviôse that, "on the previous evening, at half-past ten of the clock, the Englishman known as the Scarlet Pimpernel, who for three years has conspired against the safety of the Republic, was arrested through the patriotic exertions of citizen Chauvelin, and conveyed to the Conciergerie, where he now lies—sick, but closely guarded. Long live the Republic!"

PART II

24

THE NEWS

The grey January day was falling, drowsy and dull, into the arms of night.

Marguerite, sitting in the dusk beside the fire in her small boudoir, shivered a little as she drew her scarf closer round her shoulders.

Edwards, the butler, entered with the lamp. The room looked peculiarly cheery now, with the delicate white panelling of the wall glowing under the soft kiss of the flickering firelight and the steadier glow of the rose-shaded lamp.

"Has the courier not arrived yet, Edwards?" asked Marguerite, fixing the impassive face of the well-drilled servant with her large purple-rimmed eyes.

"Not yet, m'lady," he replied placidly.

"It is his day, is it not?"

"Yes, m'lady. And the forenoon is his time. But there have been heavy rains, and the roads must be rare muddy. He must have been delayed, m'lady."

"Yes, I suppose so," she said listlessly. "That will do, Edwards. No, don't close the shutters. I'll ring presently."

The man went out of the room as automatically as he had come. He closed the door behind him, and Marguerite was once more alone.

She picked up the book which she had fingered idly before the light gave out. She tried once more to fix her attention on this tale of love and adventure written by Mr. Fielding; but she had lost the thread of the story, and there was a mist between her eyes and the printed pages.

With an impatient gesture she threw down the book and passed her hand across her eyes, then seemed astonished to find that her hand was wet.

She rose and went to the window. The air outside had been singularly mild all day; the thaw was persisting and a south wind came across the Channel—from France.

Marguerite threw open the casement and sat down on the wide sill, leaning her head against the window-frame, and gazing out into the fast gathering gloom. From far away, at the foot of the gently-sloping lawns, the river murmured softly in the night; in the borders to the right and left a few snowdrops still showed like tiny white specks through the surrounding darkness. Winter had begun the process of slowly shedding her mantle, coquetting with Spring, who still lingered in the land of Infinity. Gradually the shadows drew closer and closer; the reeds and rushes on the river bank were the first to sink into their embrace, then the big cedars on the lawn, majestic and defiant, but yielding, still unconquered, to the power of night.

The tiny stars of snowdrop blossoms vanished one by one, and at last the cool, grey ribbon of the river surface was wrapped under the mantle of evening.

Only the south wind lingered on, soughing gently in the drowsy reeds, whispering among the branches of the cedars, and gently stirring the tender corollas of the sleeping snowdrops.

Marguerite seemed to open out her lungs to its breath. It had come all the way from France, and on its wings had brought something of Percy—a murmur as if he had spoken—a memory that was as intangible as a dream.

She shivered again, though of a truth it was not cold. The courier's delay had completely unsettled her nerves. Twice a week he came specially from Dover, and always he brought some message, some token which Percy had contrived to send from Paris. They were like tiny scraps of dry bread thrown to a starving woman, but they did just help to keep her heart alive—that poor, aching, disappointed heart that so longed for enduring happiness which it could never get.

The man whom she loved with all her soul did not belong to her; he belonged to suffering humanity over there in terror-stricken France, where the cries of the innocent, the persecuted, the wretched called louder to him than she in her love could do.

He had been away three months now, during which time her starving heart had fed on its memories, and on the happiness of a brief visit from him six weeks ago, when—quite unexpectedly—he had appeared before her . . . home between two desperate adventures that had given life and freedom to a number of innocent people, and nearly cost him his—and she had lain in his arms in a swoon of perfect happiness.

But he had gone away again as suddenly as he had come, and for six weeks now she had lived partly in anticipation of the courier with messages from him, and partly on the fitful joy engendered by these messages. To-day she had not even that, and the disappointment seemed just now more than she could bear.

She felt unaccountably restless, and could she but have analysed her feelings—had she dared so to do —she would have realized that the weight which oppressed her heart so that she could hardly breathe, was one of vague yet dark foreboding.

She closed the window and returned to her seat by the fire, taking up her book with the strong resolution not to allow her nerves to get the better of her. But it was difficult to fix one's attention on the adventures of Master Tom Jones when one's mind was fully engrossed with those of Sir Percy Blakeney.

The sound of carriage wheels on the gravelled forecourt in the front of the house suddenly awakened her drowsy senses. She threw down the book, and with trembling hands clutched the arms of her chair, straining her ears to listen. A carriage at this hour—and on this damp winter's evening! She racked her mind wondering who it could be.

Lady Ffoulkes was in London, she knew. Sir Andrew of course, was in Paris. His Royal Highness, ever a faithful visitor, would surely not venture out to Richmond in this inclement weather—and the courier always came on horseback.

There was a murmur of voices; that of Edwards, mechanical and placid, could be heard quite distinctly saying:

"I'm sure that her ladyship will be at home for you, m'lady. But I'll go and ascertain."

Marguerite ran to the door and with joyful eagerness tore it open.

"Suzanne!" she called—"my little Suzanne! I thought you were in London. Come up quickly! In the boudoir—yes. Oh! what good fortune has brought you?"

Suzanne flew into her arms, holding the friend whom she loved so well close and closer to her heart, trying to hide her face, which was wet with tears, in the folds of Marguerite's kerchief.

"Come inside, my darling," said Marguerite. "Why, how cold your little hands are!"

She was on the point of turning back to her boudoir drawing Lady Ffoulkes by the hand, when suddenly she caught sight of Sir Andrew, who stood at a little distance from her, at the top of the stairs.

"Sir Andrew!" she exclaimed with unstinted gladness.

Then she paused. The cry of welcome died on her lips, leaving them dry and parted. She suddenly felt as if some fearful talons had gripped her heart and were tearing at it with sharp, long nails; the blood flew from her cheeks and from her limbs, leaving her with a sense of icy numbness.

She backed into the room, still holding Suzanne's hand, and drawing her in with her. Sir Andrew followed them, then closed the door behind him. At last the word escaped Marguerite's parched lips:

"Percy! Something has happened to him! He is dead?"

"No, no!" exclaimed Sir Andrew quickly.

Suzanne put her loving arms round her friend and drew her down into the chair by the fire. She knelt at her feet on the hearthrug, and pressed her own burning lips on Marguerite's icy-cold hands. Sir Andrew stood silently by, a world of loving friendship, of heart-broken sorrow, in his eyes.

There was silence in the pretty white-panelled room for a while. Marguerite sat with her eyes closed, bringing the whole armoury of her will-power to bear her up outwardly now.

"Tell me!" she said at last, and her voice was toneless and dull, like one that came from the depths of a grave—"tell me—exactly—everything. Don't be afraid. I can bear it. Don't be afraid."

Sir Andrew remained standing, with bowed head and one hand resting on the table. In a firm, clear voice he told her the events of the past few days as they were known to him. All that he tried to hide was Armand's disobedience, which, in his heart, he felt was the primary cause of the catastrophe. He told of the rescue of the Dauphin from the Temple, the midnight drive in the coal-cart, the meeting with Hastings and Tony in the spinney. He only gave vague explanations of Armand's stay in Paris, which caused Percy to go back to the city, even at the moment when his most daring plan had been so successfully carried through.

"Armand, I understand, has fallen in love with a beautiful woman in Paris, Lady Blakeney," he said, seeing that a strange, puzzled look had appeared in Marguerite's pale face. "She was arrested a day or two before the rescue of the Dauphin from the Temple. Armand could not join us. He felt that he could not leave her. I am sure that you will understand."

Then as she made no comment, he resumed his narrative:

"I had been ordered to go back to La Villette, and there to resume my duties as a labourer in the day-time, and to wait for Percy during the night. The fact that I had received no message from him for two days had made me somewhat worried, but I have such faith in him, such belief in his good luck and his ingenuity, that I would not allow myself to be really anxious. Then on the third day I heard the news."

"What news?" asked Marguerite mechanically.

"That the Englishman who was known as the Scarlet Pimpernel had been captured in a house in the Rue de la Croix Blanche, and had been imprisoned in the Conciergerie."

"The Rue de la Croix Blanche? Where is that?"

"In the Montmartre quarter. Armand lodged there. Percy, I imagine, was working to get him away; and those brutes captured him."

"Having heard the news, Sir Andrew, what did you do?"

"I went into Paris and ascertained its truth."

"And there is no doubt of it?"

"Alas, none! I went to the house in the Rue de la Croix Blanche. Armand had disappeared. I succeeded in inducing the concierge to talk. She seems to have been devoted to her lodger. Amidst tears she told me some of the details of the capture. Can you bear to hear them, Lady Blakeney?"

"Yes—tell me everything—don't be afraid," she reiterated with the same dull monotony.

"It appears that early on the Tuesday morning the son of the concierge—a lad about fifteen—was sent off by her lodger with a message to No. 9 Rue St. Germain l'Auxerrois. That was the house where Percy was staying all last week, where he kept disguises and so on for us all, and where some of our meetings were held. Percy evidently expected that Armand would try and communicate with him at that address, for when the lad arrived in front of the house he was accosted—so he says—by a big, rough workman, who browbeat him into giving up the lodger's letter, and finally pressed a piece of gold into his hand. The workman was Blakeney, of course. I imagine that Armand, at the time that he wrote the letter, must have been under the belief that Mademoiselle Lange was still in prison; he could not know then that Blakeney had already got her into comparative safety. In the letter he must have spoken of the terrible plight in which he stood, and also of his fears for the woman he loved. Percy was not the man to leave a comrade in the lurch! He would not be the man whom we all love and admire, whose word we all obey, for whose sake we would gladly all of us give our life—he would not be that man if he did not brave even certain dangers in order to be of help to those who call on him. Armand called and Percy went to him. He must have known that Armand was being spied upon, for Armand, alas! was already a marked man, and the watch-dogs of those infernal committees were already on his heels. Whether these sleuth-hounds had followed the son of the concierge and seen him give the letter to the workman in the Rue St. Germain l'Auxerrois, or whether the concierge in the Rue de la Croix Blanche was nothing but a spy of Héron's, or, again whether the Committee of General Security kept a company of soldiers on constant guard in that house, we shall, of course, never know. All that I do know is that Percy entered that fatal house at half-past ten, and that a quarter of an hour later the concierge saw some of the soldiers descending the stairs, carrying a heavy burden. She peeped out of her lodge, and by the light in the corridor she saw that that heavy burden was the body of a man bound closely with ropes: his eyes were closed, his clothes were stained with blood. He was seemingly unconscious. The next day the official organ of the Government proclaimed the capture of the Scarlet Pimpernel, and there was a public holiday in honour of the event."

Marguerite had listened to this terrible narrative dry-eyed and silent. Now she still sat there, hardly conscious of what went on around her—of Suzanne's tears, that fell unceasingly upon her fingers—of Sir Andrew, who had sunk into a chair, and buried his head in his hands. She was hardly conscious that she lived; the universe seemed to have stood still before this awful, monstrous cataclysm.

But, nevertheless, she was the first to return to the active realities of the present.

"Sir Andrew," she said after a while, "tell me, where are my Lords Tony and Hastings?"

"At Calais, madam," he replied. "I saw them there on my way hither. They had delivered the Dauphin safely into the hands of his adherents at Mantes, and were awaiting Blakeney's further orders, as he had commanded them to do."

"Will they wait for us there, think you?"

"For us, Lady Blakeney?" he exclaimed in puzzlement.

"Yes, for us, Sir Andrew," she replied, whilst the ghost of a smile flitted across her drawn face; "you had thought of accompanying me to Paris, had you not?"

"But Lady Blakeney——"

"Ah! I know what you would say, Sir Andrew. You will speak of dangers, of risks, of death mayhap; you will tell me that I as a woman can do nothing to help my husband—that I could be but a hindrance to him just as I was in Boulogne. But everything is so different now. Whilst those brutes planned his capture he was clever enough to outwit them; but now they have actually got him think you they'll let him escape? They'll watch him night and day, my friend, just as they watched the unfortunate Queen; but they'll not keep him months, weeks, or even days in prison—even Chauvelin now will no longer attempt to play with the Scarlet Pimpernel. They have him, and they will hold him until such time as they take him to the guillotine."

Her voice broke in a sob; her self-control was threatening to leave her. She was but a woman, young and passionately in love with the man who was about to die an ignominious death, far away from his country, his kindred, his friends.

"I cannot let him die alone, Sir Andrew; he will be longing for me, and—and, after all, there are you, and my Lord Tony, and Lord Hastings and the others; surely—surely we are not going to let him die, not like that, and not alone."

"You are right, Lady Blakeney," said Sir Andrew earnestly; "we are not going to let him die, if human agency can do aught to save him. Already Tony, Hastings and I have agreed to return to Paris. There are one or two hidden places in and around the city known only to Percy and to the members of the League where he must find one or more of us if he succeeds in getting away. All the way between Paris and Calais we have places of refuge, places where any of us can hide at a given moment; where we can find disguises when we want them, or horses in an emergency. No! no! we are not going to despair, Lady Blakeney; there are nineteen of us prepared to lay down our lives for the Scarlet Pimpernel. Already I, as his lieutenant, have been selected as the leader of as determined a gang as ever entered on a work of rescue before. We leave for Paris to-morrow, and if human pluck and devotion can destroy mountains, then we'll destroy them. Our watchword is: 'God save the Scarlet Pimpernel!'"

He knelt beside her chair and kissed the cold fingers which, with a sad little smile, she held out to him.

"And God bless you all!" she murmured.

Suzanne had risen to her feet when her husband knelt; now he stood up beside her. The dainty young woman—hardly more than a child—was doing her best to restrain her tears.

"See how selfish I am," said Marguerite. "I talk calmly of taking your husband from you, when I myself know the bitterness of such partings."

"My husband will go where his duty calls him," said Suzanne with charming and simple dignity. "I love him with all my heart, because he is brave and good. He could not leave his comrade, who is also his chief, in the lurch. God will protect him, I know. I would not ask him to play the part of a coward."

Her brown eyes glowed with pride. She was the true wife of a soldier, and with all her dainty ways and childlike manners she was a splendid woman and a staunch friend. Sir Percy Blakeney had saved her entire family from death; the Comte and Comtesse de Tournay, the Vicomte, her brother, and she herself all owed their lives to the Scarlet Pimpernel.

This she was not likely to forget.

"There is but little danger for us, I fear me," said Sir Andrew lightly; "the revolutionary Government only wants to strike at a head, it cares nothing for the limbs. Perhaps it feels that without our leader we are enemies not worthy of persecution. If there are any dangers, so much the better," he added; "but I don't anticipate any, unless we succeed in freeing our chief; and having freed him, we fear nothing more."

"The same applies to me, Sir Andrew," rejoined Marguerite earnestly. "Now that they have captured Percy, those human fiends will care naught for me. If you succeed in freeing Percy I, like you, will have nothing more to fear, and if you fail——"

She paused and put her small, white hand on Sir Andrew's arm.

"Take me with you, Sir Andrew," she entreated; "do not condemn me to the awful torture of weary waiting, day after day, wondering, guessing, never daring to hope, lest hope deferred be more hard to bear than dreary hopelessness."

Then as Sir Andrew, very undecided, yet half inclined to yield, stood silent and irresolute, she pressed her point, gently but firmly insistent.

"I would not be in the way, Sir Andrew; I would know how to efface myself so as not to interfere with your plans. But, oh!" she added, while a quivering note of passion trembled in her voice, "can't you see that I must breathe the air that he breathes else I shall stifle or mayhap go mad?"

Sir Andrew turned to his wife, a mute query in his eyes.

"You would do an inhuman and a cruel act," said Suzanne with seriousness that sat quaintly on her baby face, "if you did not afford your protection to Marguerite, for I do believe that if you did not take her with you to-morrow she would go to Paris alone."

Marguerite thanked her friend with her eyes. Suzanne was a child in nature, but she had a woman's heart. She loved her husband, and therefore knew and understood what Marguerite must be suffering now.

Sir Andrew no longer could resist the unfortunate woman's earnest pleading. Frankly, he thought that if she remained in England while Percy was in such deadly peril she ran the grave risk of losing her reason before the terrible strain of suspense. He knew her to be a woman of courage, and one capable of great physical endurance; and really he was quite honest when he said that he did not believe there would be much danger for the headless League of the Scarlet Pimpernel unless they succeeded in freeing their chief. And if they did succeed, then indeed there would be nothing to fear for the brave and loving wife who, like every true woman does, and has done in like circumstances since the beginning of time, was only demanding with passionate insistence the right to share the fate, good or ill, of the man whom she loved.

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PARIS ONCE MORE

Sir Andrew had just come in. He was trying to get a little warmth into his half-frozen limbs, for the cold had set in again, and this time with renewed vigour, and Marguerite was pouring out a cup of hot coffee which she had been brewing for him. She had not asked for news. She knew that he had none to give her, else he had not worn that wearied, despondent look on his kind face.

"I'll just try one more place this evening," he said as soon as he had swallowed some of the hot coffee—"a restaurant in the Rue de la Harpe; the members of the Cordeliers' Club often go there for supper, and they are usually well informed. I might glean something definite there."

"It seems very strange that they are so slow in bringing him to trial," said Marguerite in that dull, toneless voice which had become habitual to her. "When you first brought me the awful news that . . . I made sure that they would bring him to trial at once, and was in terror lest we arrived here too late to—to see him."

She checked herself quickly, bravely trying to still the quiver of her voice.

"And of Armand?" she asked.

He shook his head sadly.

"With regard to him I am at a still greater loss," he said. "I cannot find his name on any of the prison registers, and I know that he is not in the Conciergerie. They have cleared out all the prisoners from there; there is only Percy——"

"Poor Armand!" she sighed; "it must be almost worse for him than for any of us; it was his first act of thoughtless disobedience that brought all this misery upon our heads."

She spoke sadly but quietly. Sir Andrew noted that there was no bitterness in her tone. But her very quietude was heart-breaking; there was such an infinity of despair in the calm of her eyes.

"Well! though we cannot understand it all, Lady Blakeney," he said with forced cheerfulness, "we must remember one thing—that whilst there is life there is hope."

"Hope!" she exclaimed with a world of pathos in her sigh, her large eyes dry and circled, fixed with indescribable sorrow on her friend's face.

Ffoulkes turned his head away, pretending to busy himself with the coffee-making utensils. He could not bear to see that look of hopelessness in her face, for in his heart he could not find the wherewithal to cheer her. Despair was beginning to seize on him too, and this he would not let her see.

They had been in Paris three days now, and it was six days since Blakeney had been arrested. Sir Andrew and Marguerite had found temporary lodgings inside Paris, Tony and Hastings were just outside the gates and all along the route between Paris and Calais, at St. Germain, at Mantes, in the villages between Beauvais and Amiens, wherever money could obtain friendly help, members of the devoted League of the Scarlet Pimpernel lay in hiding, waiting to aid their chief.

Ffoulkes had ascertained that Percy was kept a close prisoner in the Conciergerie, in the very rooms occupied by Marie Antoinette during the last months of her life. He left poor Marguerite to guess how closely that elusive Scarlet Pimpernel was being guarded, the precautions surrounding him being even more minute than those which had made the unfortunate Queen's closing days a martyrdom for her.

But of Armand he could glean no satisfactory news, only the negative probability that he was not detained in any of the larger prisons of Paris, as no register which he, Ffoulkes, so laboriously consulted bore record of the name of St. Just.

Haunting the restaurants and drinking-booths where the most advanced Jacobins and Terrorists were wont to meet, he had learned one or two details of Blakeney's incarceration which he could not possibly impart to Marguerite. The capture of the mysterious Englishman known as the Scarlet Pimpernel had created a great deal of popular satisfaction; but it was obvious that not only was the public mind not allowed to associate that capture with the escape of little Capet from the Temple, but it soon became clear to Ffoulkes that the news of that escape was still being kept a profound secret.

On one occasion he had succeeded in spying on the Chief Agent of the Committee of General Security, whom he knew by sight, while the latter was sitting at dinner in the company of a stout, florid man with pock-marked face and podgy hands covered with rings.

Sir Andrew marvelled who this man might be.

Héron spoke to him in ambiguous phrases that would have been unintelligible to anyone who did not know the circumstances of the Dauphin's escape and the part that the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel had played in it. But to Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, who—cleverly diguised as a farrier, grimy after his day's work—was straining his ears to listen whilst apparently consuming huge slabs of boiled beef, it soon became clear that the chief agent and his fat friend were talking of the Dauphin and of Blakeney.

"He won't hold out much longer, citizen," the chief agent was saying in a confident voice; "our men are absolutely unremitting in their task. Two of them watch him night and day; they look after him well, and practically never lose sight of him, but the moment he tries to get any sleep one of them rushes into the cell with a loud banging of bayonet and sabre, and noisy tread on the flagstones, and shouts at the top of his voice: 'Now then, aristo, where's the brat? Tell us now, and you shall lie down and go to sleep.' I have done it myself all through one day just for the pleasure of it. It's a little tiring, for you have to shout a good deal now, and sometimes give the cursed Englishman a good shake up. He has had five days of it, and not one wink of sleep during that time—not one single minute of rest—and he only gets enough food to keep him alive. I tell you he can't last. Citizen Chauvelin had a splendid idea there. It will all come right in a day or two.

"H'm!" grunted the other sulkily; "those Englishmen are tough."

"Yes!" retorted Héron, with a grim laugh and a leer of savagery that made his gaunt face look positively hideous—"you would have given out after three days, friend de Batz, would you not? And I warned you, didn't I? I told you if you tampered with the brat I would make you cry in mercy to me for death."

"And I warned you," said the other imperturbably, "not to worry so much about me, but to keep your eyes open for those cursed Englishmen."

"I am keeping my eyes open for you, nevertheless, my friend. If I thought you knew where the vermin's spawn was at this moment I would——"

"You would put me on the same rack that you or your precious friend, Chauvelin, have devised for the Englishman. But I don't know where the lad is. If I did I would not be in Paris."

"I know that," assented Héron with a sneer; "you would soon be after the reward—over in Austria, what?—but I have your movements tracked day and night, my friend. I dare say you are as anxious as we are as to the whereabouts of the child. Had he been taken over the frontier you would have been the first to hear of it, eh? No," he added confidently, and as if anxious to reassure himself, "my firm belief is that the original idea of these confounded Englishmen was to try and get the child over to England, and that they alone know where he is. I tell you it won't be many days before that very withered Scarlet Pimpernel will order his followers to give little Capet up to us. Oh! they are hanging about Paris some of them, I know that; citizen Chauvelin is convinced that the wife isn't very far away. Give her a sight of her husband now, say I, and she'll make the others give the child up soon enough."

The man laughed like some hyena gloating over its prey. Sir Andrew nearly betrayed himself then. He had to dig his nails into his own flesh to prevent himself from springing then and there at the throat of that wretch whose monstrous ingenuity had invented torture for the fallen enemy far worse than any that the cruelties of mediæval Inquisitions had devised.

So they would not let him sleep! A simple idea born in the brain of a fiend. Héron had spoken of Chauvelin as the originator of the devilry; a man weakened deliberately day by day by insufficient food and the horrible process of denying him rest. It seemed inconceivable that human, sentient beings should have thought of such a thing. Perspiration stood up in beads on Sir Andrew's brow when he thought of his friend, brought down by want of sleep to—what? His physique was exceedingly powerful, but could it stand against such racking torment for long? And the clear, the alert mind, the scheming brain, the reckless daring—how soon would these become enfeebled by the slow, steady torture of an utter want of rest?

Ffoulkes had to smother a cry of horror, which surely must have drawn the attention of that fiend on himself had he not been so engrossed in the enjoyment of his own devilry. As it is, he ran out of the stuffy eating-house, for he felt as if its fetid air must choke him.

For an hour after that he wandered about the streets, not daring to face Marguerite, lest his eyes betrayed some of the horror which was shaking his very soul.

That was twenty-four hours ago. To-day he had learnt little else. It was generally known that the Englishman was in the Conciergerie Prison, that he was being closely watched, and that his trial would come on within the next few days; but no one seemed to know exactly when. The public was getting restive, demanding that trial and execution to which every one seemed to look forward as to a holiday. In the meanwhile the escape of the Dauphin had been kept from the knowledge of the public; Héron and his gang, fearing for their lives, had still hopes of extracting from the Englishman the secret of the lad's hiding-place, and the means they employed for arriving at this end were worthy of Lucifer and his host of devils in hell.

From other fragments of conversation which Sir Andrew Ffoulkes had gleaned that same evening it seemed to him that in order to hide their defalcations Héron and the four commissaries in charge of little Capet had substituted a deaf and dumb child for the escaped little prisoner. This miserable small wreck of humanity was reputed to be sick and kept in a darkened room in bed, and was in that condition exhibited to any member of the Convention who had the right to see him. A partition had been very hastily erected in the inner room once occupied by the Simons, and the child was kept behind that partition, and no one was allowed to come too near to him. Thus the fraud was succeeding fairly well. Héron and his accomplices only cared to save their skins, and the wretched little substitute being really ill, they firmly hoped that he would soon die, when no doubt they would bruit abroad the news of the death of Capet, which would relieve them of further responsibility.

That such ideas, such thoughts, such schemes should have generated in human minds it is almost impossible to conceive, and yet we know from no less important a witness than Madame Simon herself that the child who died in the Temple a few weeks later was a poor little imbecile, a deaf and dumb child brought hither from one of the asylums and left to die in peace. There was nobody but kindly Death to take him out of his misery, for the giant intellect that had planned and carried out the rescue of the uncrowned King of France, and which alone might have had the power to save him too, was being broken on the rack of enforced sleeplessness.

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THE BITTEREST FOE

THAT same evening Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, having announced his intention of gleaning further news of Armand, if possible, went out shortly after seven o'clock, promising to be home again about nine.

Marguerite, on the other hand, had to make her friend a solemn promise that she would try and eat some supper which the landlady of these miserable apartments had agreed to prepare for her. So far they had been left in peaceful occupation of these squalid lodgings in a tumble-down house on the Quai de la Ferraille, facing the house of Justice, the grim walls of which Marguerite would watch with wide-open, dry eyes for as long as the grey wintry light lingered over them.

Even now, though the darkness had set in, and snow, falling in close, small flakes, threw a thick white veil over the landscape, she sat at the open window long after Sir Andrew had gone out, watching the few small flickers of light that blinked across from the other side of the river, and which came from the windows of the Châtelet towers. The windows of the Conciergerie she could not see, for these gave on one of the inner courtyards; but there was a melancholy consolation even in gazing on those walls that held in their cruel, grim embrace all that she loved in the world.

It seemed so impossible to think of Percy—the laughter-loving, irresponsible, light-hearted adventurer—as the prey of those fiends who would revel in their triumph, who would crush him, humiliate him, insult him—ye gods alive! even torture him, perhaps—that they might break the indomitable spirit that would mock them even on the threshold of death.

Surely, surely God would never allow such monstrous infamy as the deliverance of the noble, soaring eagle into the hands of those preying jackals! Marguerite—though her heart ached beyond what human nature could endure, though her anguish on her husband's account was doubled by that which she felt for her brother—could not bring herself to give up all hope. Sir Andrew said it rightly; while there was life there was hope. While there was life in those vigorous limbs, spirit in that daring mind, how could puny, rampant beasts gain the better of the immortal soul? As for Armand—why, if Percy were free she would have no cause to fear for Armand.

She uttered a sigh of deep, of passionate regret and longing. If she could only see her husband; if she could only look for one second into those laughing, lazy eyes, wherein she alone knew how to fathom the infinity of passion that lay within their depths; if she could but once feel his ardent kiss on her lips, she could more easily endure this agonizing suspense, and wait confidently and courageously for the issue.

She turned away from the window, for the night was getting bitterly cold. From the tower of St. Germain l'Auxerrois the clock slowly struck eight. Even as the last sound of the historic bell died away in the distance she heard a timid knocking at the door.

"Enter!" she called unthinkingly.

She thought it was her landlady come up with more wood, mayhap, for the fire, so she did not turn to the door when she heard it being slowly opened, then closed again, and presently a soft tread on the threadbare carpet.

"May I crave your kind attention, Lady Blakeney?" said a harsh voice, subdued to tones of ordinary courtesy.

She quickly repressed a cry of terror. How well she knew that voice! When last she heard it it was at Boulogne, dictating that infamous letter—the weapon wherewith Percy had so effectually foiled his enemy. She turned and faced the man who was her bitterest foe—hers in the person of the man she loved.

"Chauvelin!" she gasped.

"Himself at your service, dear lady," he said simply.

He stood in the full light of the lamp, his trim, small figure boldly cut out against the dark wall beyond. He wore the usual sable-coloured clothes, which he affected, with the primly-folded jabot and cuffs edged with narrow lace.

Without waiting for permission from her, he quietly and deliberately placed his hat and cloak on a chair. Then he turned once more toward her, and made a movement as if to advance into the room; but instinctively she put up a hand as if to ward off the calamity of his approach.

He shrugged his shoulders, and the shadow of a smile that had neither mirth nor kindliness in it hovered round the corners of his thin lips.

"Have I your permission to sit?" he asked.

"As you will," she replied slowly, keeping her wide-open eyes fixed upon him, as does a frightened bird upon the serpent whom it loathes and fears.

"And may I crave a few moments of your undivided attention, Lady Blakeney?" he continued, taking a chair, and so placing it beside the table that the light of the lamp when he sat remained behind him and his face was left in shadow.

"Is it necessary?" asked Marguerite.

"It is," he replied curtly, "if you desire to see and speak with your husband—to be of use to him before it is too late."

"Then, I pray you, speak, citizen, and I will listen."

She sank into a chair, not heeding whether the light of the lamp fell on her face or not, whether the lines in her haggard cheeks or her tear-dimmed eyes showed plainly the sorrow and despair that had traced them. She had nothing to hide from this man, the cause of all the tortures which she endured. She knew that neither courage nor sorrow would move him, and that hatred for Percy—personal deadly hatred for the man who had twice foiled him—had long crushed the last spark of humanity in his heart.

"Perhaps, Lady Blakeney," he began after a slight pause and in his smooth, even voice, "it would interest you to hear how I succeeded in procuring for myself this pleasure of an interview with you?"

"Your spies did their usual work, I suppose," she said coldly.

"Exactly. We have been on your track for three days, and yesterday evening an unguarded movement on the part of Sir Andrew Ffoulkes gave us the final clue to your whereabouts."

"Of Sir Andrew Ffoulkes?" she asked, greatly puzzled.

"He was in an eating-house, cleverly disguised I own, trying to glean information, no doubt, as to the probable fate of Sir Percy Blakeney. As chance would have it, my friend Héron, of the Committee of General Security, chanced to be discussing with reprehensible openness—er—certain—what shall I say?—certain measures which at my advice the Committee of Public Safety have been forced to adopt with a view to——"

"A truce to your smooth-tongued speeches, citizen Chauvelin," she interposed firmly. "Sir Andrew Ffoulkes has told me naught of this—so I pray you speak plainly and to the point, if you can."

He bowed with marked irony.

"As you please," he said. "Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, hearing certain matters of which I will tell you anon, made a movement which betrayed him to one of our spies. At a word from citizen Héron this man followed on the heels of the young farrier who had shown such interest in the conversation of the Chief Agent. Sir Andrew, I imagine, burning with indignation at what he had heard, was perhaps not quite so cautious as he usually is. Anyway, the man on his track followed him to this door. It was quite simple, as you see. As for me, I had guessed a week ago that we would see the beautiful Lady Blakeney in Paris before long. When I knew where Sir Andrew Ffoulkes lodged, I had no difficulty in guessing that Lady Blakeney would not be far off."

"And what was there in citizen Héron's conversation last night," she asked quietly, "that so aroused Sir Andrew's indignation?"

"He has not told you?"

"No."

"Oh! it is very simple. Let me tell you, Lady Blakeney, exactly how matters stand. Sir Percy

Blakeney—before lucky chance at last delivered him into our hands—thought fit, as no doubt you know, to meddle with our most important prisoner of State."

"A child. I know it, sir—the son of a murdered father whom you and your friends were slowly doing to death."

"That is as it may be, Lady Blakeney," rejoined Chauvelin calmly; "but it was none of Sir Percy Blakeney's business. This, however, he chose to disregard. He succeeded in carrying little Capet from the Temple, and two days later we had him under lock and key."

"Through some infamous and treacherous trick, sir," she retorted.

Chauvelin made no immediate reply; his pale, inscrutable eyes were fixed upon her face, and the smile of irony round his mouth appeared more strongly-marked than before.

"That again, is as it may be," he said suavely; "but anyhow for the moment we have the upper hand. Sir Percy is in the Conciergerie, guarded day and night, more closely than Marie Antoinette even was guarded."

"And he laughs at your bolts and bars, sir," she rejoined proudly. "Remember Calais, remember Boulogne! His laugh at your discomfiture, then, must resound in your ear even to-day."

"Yes; but for the moment laughter is on our side. Still we are willing to forgo even that pleasure if Sir Percy will but move a finger towards his own freedom."

"Again some infamous letter?" she asked with bitter contempt; "some attempt against his honour?"

"No, no, Lady Blakeney," he interposed with perfect blandness. "Matters are so much simpler now, you see. We hold Sir Percy at our mercy.

We could send him to the guillotine to-morrow, but we might be willing—remember, I only say we might—to exercise our prerogative of mercy if Sir Percy Blakeney will on his side accede to a request from us."

"And that request?"

"Is a very natural one. He took Capet away from us, and it is but credible that he knows at the present moment exactly where the child is. Let him instruct his followers—an I mistake not, Lady Blakeney, there are several of them not very far from Paris just now—let him, I say, instruct these followers of his to return the person of young Capet to us, and not only will we undertake to give these same gentlemen a safe conduct back to England, but we even might be inclined to deal somewhat less harshly with the gallant Scarlet Pimpernel himself."

She laughed a hard, mirthless, contemptuous laugh.

"I don't think that I quite understand," she said after a moment or two, whilst he waited calmly until her outbreak of hysterical mirth had subsided. "You want my husband—the Scarlet Pimpernel, citizen—to deliver the little King of France to you after he has risked his life to save the child from your clutches? Is that what you are trying to say?"

"It is," rejoined Chauvelin complacently, "just what we have been saying to Sir Percy Blakeney for the past six days, madame."

"Well! then you have had your answer, have you not?"

"Yes," he replied slowly; "but the answer has become weaker day by day."

"Weaker? I don't understand."

"Let me explain, Lady Blakeney," said Chauvelin, now with measured emphasis. He put both elbows on the table and leaned well forward, peering into her face, lest one of its varied expressions escaped him.

"Just now you taunted me with my failure in Calais, and again at Boulogne; with a proud toss of the head, which I own is excessively becoming, you threw the name of the Scarlet Pimpernel in my face like a challenge which I no longer dare to accept. 'The Scarlet Pimpernel,' you would say to me, 'stands for loyalty, for honour, and for indomitable courage. Think you he would sacrifice his honour to obtain your mercy? Remember Boulogne and your discomfiture!' All of which, dear lady, is perfectly charming and womanly and enthusiastic, and I, bowing my humble head, must own that I was fooled in Calais and baffled in Boulogne. But in Boulogne I made a grave mistake, and one from which I learned a lesson, which I am putting into practice now."

He paused a while as if waiting for her reply. His pale, keen eyes had already noted that with every phrase he uttered the lines in her beautiful face became more hard and set. A look of horror was gradually spreading over it, as if the icy-cold hand of death had passed over her eyes and cheeks, leaving them rigid like stone.

"In Boulogne," resumed Chauvelin quietly, satisfied that his words were hitting steadily at her heart—"in Boulogne Sir Percy and I did not fight an equal fight. Fresh from a pleasant sojourn in his own magnificent home, full of the spirit of adventure which puts the essence of life into a man's veins, Sir Percy Blakeney's splendid physique was pitted against my feeble powers. Of course I lost the battle. I made the mistake of trying to subdue a man who was in the zenith of his strength, whereas now——"

"Yes, citizen Chauvelin," she said, "whereas now——?"

"Sir Percy Blakeney has been in the prison of the

Conciergerie for exactly one week, Lady Blakeney," he replied, speaking very slowly, and letting every one of his words sink impressively into her mind. "Even before he had time to take the bearings of his cell or to plan on his own behalf one of those remarkable escapes for which he is so justly famous, our men began to work on a scheme which I am proud to say originated with myself. A week has gone by since then, Lady Blakeney, and during that time a special company of prison guard, acting under the orders of the Committees of General Security and of Public Safety, have questioned the prisoner unremittingly—unremittingly, remember—day and night. Two by two these men take it in turns to enter the prisoner's cell every quarter of an hour—lately it has had to be more often—and ask him the question, 'Where is little Capet?' Up to now we have received no satisfactory reply, although we have explained to Sir Percy that many of his followers are honouring the neighbourhood of Paris with their visit, and that all we ask for from him are instructions to those gallant gentlemen to bring young Capet back to us. It is all very simple; unfortunately the prisoner is somewhat obstinate. At first, even the idea seemed to amuse him; he used to laugh and say that he always had the faculty of sleeping with his eyes open. But our soldiers are untiring in their efforts, and the want of sleep as well as of a sufficiency of food and of fresh air is certainly beginning to tell on Sir Percy Blakeney's magnificent physique. I don't think that it will be very long before he gives way to our gentle persuasions; and in any case now, I assure you, dear lady, that we need not fear any attempt on his part to escape. I doubt if he could walk very steadily across this room——"

Marguerite had sat quite silent and apparently impassive all the while that Chauvelin had been speaking; even now she scarcely stirred. Her face expressed absolutely nothing but deep puzzlement. There was a frown between her brows, and her eyes, which were always of such liquid blue, now looked almost black. She was trying to visualize that which Chauvelin had put before her: a man harassed day and night, unceasingly, unremittingly, with one question—allowed neither respite nor sleep—his brain, soul, and body fagged out at every hour, every moment of the day and night, until mind and body and soul must inevitably give way under anguish ten thousand times more unendurable than any physical torment invented by monsters in barbaric times.

That man thus harassed, thus fagged out, thus martyrized at all hours of the day and night was her husband, whom she loved with every fibre of her being, with every throb of her heart.

Torture? Oh, no! these were advanced and civilized times that could afford to look with horror on the excesses of mediæval days. This was a revolution that made for progress, and challenged the opinion of the world. The cells of the Temple, of La Force, or the Conciergerie held no secret inquisition with iron maidens and racks and thumbscrews; but a few men had put their tortuous brains together and had said one to another: "We want to find out from that man where we can lay our hands on little Capet, so we won't let him sleep until he has told us. It is not torture—oh, no! Who would dare to say that we torture our prisoners? It is only a little horseplay, worrying to the prisoner, no doubt; but, after all, he can end the unpleasantness at any moment. He need but to answer our question, and he can go to sleep as comfortably as a little child. The want of sleep is very trying, the want of proper food and of fresh air is very weakening; the prisoner must give way sooner or later——"

So these fiends had decided it between them, and they had put their idea into execution for one whole week.

Marguerite looked at Chauvelin as she would on some monstrous, inscrutable Sphinx, marvelling if God—even in His anger—could really have created such a fiendish brain, or, having created it, could allow it to wreak such devilry unpunished.

Even now she felt that he was enjoying the mental anguish which he had put upon her, and she saw his thin, evil lips curled into a smile.

"So you came to-night to tell me all this?" she asked as soon as she could trust herself to speak. Her impulse was to shriek out her indignation, her horror of him, into his face. She longed to call down God's eternal curse upon this fiend; but instinctively she held herself in check. Her indignation, her words of loathing would only have added to his delight.

"You have had your wish," she added coldly, "now I pray you, go."

"Your pardon, Lady Blakeney," he said with all his habitual blandness; "my object in coming to see you to-night was twofold. Methought that I was acting as your friend in giving you authentic news of Sir Percy, and in suggesting the possibility of your adding your persuasion to ours."

"My persuasion? You mean that I——"

"You would wish to see your husband, would you not, Lady Blakeney?"

"Yes."

"Then I pray you command me. I will grant you the permission whenever you wish to go."

"You are in the hope, citizen," she said, "that I will do my best to break my husband's spirit by my tears or my prayers—is that it?"

"Not necessarily," he replied pleasantly. "I assure you that we can manage to do that ourselves, in time."

"You devil!" The cry of pain and of horror was involuntarily wrung from the depths of her soul. "Are you not afraid that God's hand will strike you where you stand?"

"No," he said lightly; "I am not afraid, Lady Blakeney. You see, I do not happen to believe in God. Come!" he added more seriously, "have I not proved to you that my offer is disinterested? Yet I repeat it even now. If you desire to see Sir Percy in prison, command me, and the doors shall be open to you."

She waited a moment, looking him straight and quite dispassionately in the face; then she said coldly:

"Very well! I will go."

"When?" he asked.

"This evening."

"Just as you wish. I would have to go and see my friend Héron first, and arrange with him for your visit."

"Then go. I will follow in half an hour."

"C'est entendu. Will you be at the main entrance of the Conciergerie at half-past nine? You know it, perhaps—no? It is in the Rue de la Barillerie, immediately on the right at the foot of the great staircase of the house of Justice."

"Of the house of Justice!" she exclaimed involuntarily, a world of bitter contempt in her cry. Then she added in her former matter-of-fact tones:

"Very good, citizen. At half-past nine I will be at the entrance you name."

"And I will be at the door prepared to escort you."

He took up his hat and coat and bowed ceremoniously to her. Then he turned to go. At the door a cry from her—involuntary enough, God knows!—made him pause.

"My interview with the prisoner," she said, vainly trying, poor soul! to repress that quiver of anxiety in her voice, "it will be private?"

"Oh, yes! Of course," he replied with a reassuring smile. "Au revoir, Lady Blakeney! Half-past nine, remember——"

She could no longer trust herself to look on him as he finally took his departure. She was afraid—yes, absolutely afraid that her fortitude would give way—meanly, despicably uselessly give way; that she would suddenly fling herself at the feet of that sneering, inhuman wretch, that she would pray, implore—Heaven above! what might she not do in the face of this awful reality, if the last lingering shred of vanishing reason, of pride, and of courage did not hold her in check?

Therefore she forced herself not to look on that departing, sable-clad figure, on that evil face, and those hands that held Percy's fate in their cruel grip; but her ears caught the welcome sound of his departure—the opening and shutting of the door, his light footstep echoing down the stone stairs.

When at last she felt that she was really alone she uttered a loud cry like a wounded doe, and falling on her knees she buried her face in her hands in a passionate fit of weeping. Violent sobs shook her entire frame; it seemed as if an overwhelming anguish was tearing at her heart—the physical pain of it was almost unendurable. And yet even through this paroxysm of tears her mind clung to one root idea:

when she saw Percy she must be brave and calm, be able to help him if he wanted her, to do his bidding if there was anything that she could do, or any message that she could take to the others. Of hope she had none. The last ray of it had been extinguished by that fiend when he said, "We need not fear that he will escape. I doubt if he could walk very steadily across this room now."

27

IN THE CONCIERGERIE

Marguerite, accompanied by Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, walked rapidly along the quay. It lacked ten minutes to the half-hour; the night was dark and bitterly cold. Snow was still falling in sparse, thin flakes, and lay like a crisp and glittering mantle over the parapets of the bridges and the grim towers of the Châtelet Prison.

They walked on silently now. All that they had wanted to say to one another had been said inside the squalid room of their lodgings when Sir Andrew Ffoulkes had come home and learned that Chauvelin had been.

"They are killing him by inches, Sir Andrew," had been the heartrending cry which burst from Marguerite's oppressed heart as soon as her hands rested in the kindly ones of her best friend. "Is there aught that we can do?"

There was, of course, very little that could be done. One or two fine steel files which Sir Andrew gave her to conceal beneath the folds of her kerchief; also a tiny dagger with sharp, poisoned blade, which for a moment she held in her hand, hesitating, her eyes filling with tears, her heart throbbing with unspeakable sorrow.

Then slowly—very slowly—she raised the small, death-dealing instrument to her lips, and reverently kissed the narrow blade.

"If it must be!" she murmured, "God in His mercy will forgive!"

She sheathed the dagger, and this, too, she hid in the folds of her gown.

"Can you think of anything else, Sir Andrew, that he might want?" she asked. "I have money in plenty, in case those soldiers——"

Sir Andrew sighed, and turned away from her so as to hide the hopelessness which he felt. For three days now he had been exhausting every conceivable means of getting at the prison guard with bribery and corruption. But Chauvelin and his friends had taken excellent precautions. The prison of the Conciergerie, situated as it was in the very heart of the labyrinthine and complicated structure of the Châtelet and the house of Justice, and isolated from every other group of cells in the building, was inaccessible save from one narrow doorway which gave on the guard-room first, and thence on the inner cell beyond. Just as all attempts to rescue the late unfortunate Queen from that prison had failed, so now every attempt to reach the imprisoned Scarlet Pimpernel was equally doomed to bitter disappointment.

The guard-room was filled with soldiers day and night; the windows of the inner cell, heavily barred, were too small to admit of the passage of a human body, and they were raised twenty feet from the corridor below. Sir Andrew had stood in the corridor two days ago, he had looked on the window behind which he knew that his friend must be eating out his noble heart in a longing for liberty, and he had realized then that every effort at help from the outside was foredoomed to failure.

"Courage, Lady Blakeney," he said to Marguerite, when anon they had crossed the Pont au Change, and were wending their way slowly along the Rue de la Barillerie; "remember our proud dictum: the Scarlet Pimpernel never fails! and also this, that whatever messages Blakeney gives you for us, whatever he wishes us to do, we are to a man ready to do it, and to give our lives for our chief. Courage! Something tells me that a man like Percy is not going to die at the hands of such vermin as Chauvelin and his friends."

They had reached the great iron gates of the house of Justice. Marguerite, trying to smile, extended her trembling hand to this faithful, loyal comrade.

"I'll not be far," he said. "When you come out do not look to the right or left, but make straight for home; I'll not lose sight of you for a moment, and as soon as possible will overtake you. God bless you both."

He pressed his lips on her cold little hand, and watched her tall, elegant figure as she passed through the great gates until the veil of falling snow hid her from his gaze. Then with a deep sigh of bitter anguish and sorrow he turned away and was soon lost in the gloom.

Marguerite found the gate at the bottom of the monumental stairs open when she arrived. Chauvelin was standing immediately inside the building waiting for her.

"We are prepared for your visit, Lady Blakeney," he said, "and the prisoner knows that you are coming."

He led the way down one of the numerous and interminable corridors of the building, and she followed briskly, pressing her hand against her bosom, there where the folds of her kerchief hid the steel files and the precious dagger.

Even in the gloom of these ill-lighted passages she realized that she was surrounded by guards. There were soldiers everywhere; two had stood behind the door when first she entered, and had immediately closed it with a loud clang behind her; and all the way down the corridors, through the half-light engendered by feebly-flickering lamps, she caught glimpses of the white facings on the uniforms of the town guard, or occasionally the glint of steel of a bayonet. Presently Chauvelin paused beside a door. His hand was on the latch, for it did not appear to be locked, and he turned towards Marguerite.

"I am very sorry, Lady Blakeney," he said in simple, deferential tones, "that the prison authorities, who at my request are granting you this interview at such an unusual hour, have made a slight condition to your visit."

"A condition?" she asked. "What is it?"

"You must forgive me," he said, as if purposely evading her question, "for I give you my word that I had nothing to do with a regulation that you might justly feel was derogatory to your dignity. If you will kindly step in here a wardress in charge will explain to you what is required."

He pushed open the door, and stood aside ceremoniously in order to allow her to pass in. She looked on him with deep puzzlement and a look of dark suspicion in her eyes. But her mind was too much engrossed with the thought of her meeting with Percy to worry over any trifle that might—as her enemy had inferred—offend her womanly dignity.

She walked into the room, past Chauvelin, who whispered as she went by:

"I will wait for you here. And, I pray you, if you have aught to complain of, summon me at once."

Then he closed the door behind her.

The room in which Marguerite now found herself was a small unventilated quadrangle, dimly lighted by a hanging lamp. A woman in a soiled cotton gown, and lank grey hair brushed away from a parchment-like forehead, rose from the chair in which she had been sitting when Marguerite entered, and put away some knitting on which she had apparently been engaged.

"I was to tell you, citizeness," she said the moment the door had been closed and she was alone with Marguerite, "that the prison authorities have given orders that I should search you before you visit the prisoner."

She repeated this phrase mechanically like a child who has been taught to say a lesson by heart. She was a stoutish, middle-aged woman, with that pasty, flabby skin peculiar to those who live in want of fresh air; but her small, dark eyes were not unkindly, although they shifted restlessly from one object to another as if she were trying to avoid looking the other woman straight in the face.

"That you should search me!" reiterated Marguerite slowly, trying to understand.

"Yes," replied the woman. "I was to tell you to take off your clothes, so that I might look them through and through. I have often had to do this before when visitors have been allowed inside the prison, so it is no use your trying to deceive me in any way. I am very sharp at finding out if anyone has papers, or files or ropes concealed in an underpetticoat. Come," she added more roughly, seeing that Marguerite had remained motionless in the middle of the room; "the quicker you are about it the sooner you will be taken to see the prisoner."

These words had their desired effect. The proud Lady Blakeney, inwardly revolting at the outrage, knew that resistance would be worse than useless. Chauvelin was the other side of the door. A call from the woman would bring him to her assistance, and Marguerite was only longing to hasten the moment when she could be with her husband.

She took off her kerchief and her gown and calmly submitted to the woman's rough hands as they wandered with sureness and accuracy to the various pockets and folds that might conceal prohibited articles. The woman did her work with peculiar stolidity; she did not utter a word when she found the tiny steel files and placed them on a table beside her. In equal silence she laid the little dagger beside them, and the purse which contained twenty gold pieces. These she counted in front of Marguerite and then replaced them in the purse. Her face expressed neither surprise nor greed nor pity. She was obviously beyond the reach of bribery—just a machine paid by the prison authorities to do this unpleasant work, and no doubt terrorized into doing it conscientiously.

When she had satisfied herself that Marguerite had nothing further concealed about her person, she allowed her to put her dress on once more. She even offered to help her on with it. When Marguerite was fully dressed, she opened the door for her. Chauvelin was standing in the passage waiting patiently. At sight of Marguerite, whose pale, set face betrayed nothing of the indignation which she felt, he turned quick, inquiring eyes on the woman.

"Two files, a dagger and a purse with twenty louis," said the latter curtly.

Chauvelin made no comment. He received the information quite placidly, as if it had no special interest for him. Then he said quietly:

"This way, citizeness!"

Marguerite followed him, and two minutes later he stood beside a heavy, nail-studded door that had a small square grating let into one of the panels, and said simply:

"This is it."

Two soldiers of the National Guard were on sentry at the door, two more were pacing up and down outside it, and had halted when citizen Chauvelin gave his name and showed his tricolour scarf of office. From behind the small grating in the door a pair of eyes peered at the new-comers.

"Qui va là?" came the quick challenge from the guard-room within.

"Citizen Chauvelin of the Committee of Public Safety," was the prompt reply.

There was the sound of grounding of arms, of the drawing of bolts and the turning of a key in a complicated lock. The prison was kept locked from within, and very heavy bars had to be moved ere the ponderous door slowly swung open on its hinges.

Two steps led up into the guard-room. Marguerite mounted them with the same feeling of awe and almost of reverence as she would have mounted the steps of a sacrificial altar.

The guard-room itself was more brilliantly lighted than the corridor outside. The sudden glare of two or three lamps placed about the room caused her momentarily to close her eyes that were aching with many shed and unshed tears. The air was rank and heavy with the fumes of tobacco, of wine and stale food. A large barred window gave on the corridor immediately above the door.

When Marguerite felt strong enough to look around her, she saw that the room was filled with soldiers. Some were sitting, others standing, others lay on rugs against the wall, apparently asleep. There was one who appeared to be in command, for with a word he checked the noise that was going on in the room when she entered, and then he said curtly:

"This way, citizeness!"

He turned to an opening in the wall on the left, the stone-lintel of a door, from which the door itself had been removed; an iron bar ran across the opening, and this the sergeant now lifted, nodding to Marguerite to go within.

Instinctively she looked round for Chauvelin.

But he was nowhere to be seen.

28

THE CAGED LION

WAS there some instinct of humanity left in the soldier who allowed Marguerite through the barrier into the prisoner's cell? Had the wan face of this beautiful woman stirred within his heart the last chord of gentleness that was not wholly atrophied by the constant cruelties, the excesses, the mercilessness which his service under this fraternizing republic constantly demanded of him?

Perhaps some recollection of former years, when first he served his King and country, recollection of wife or sister or mother, pleaded within him in favour of this sorely-stricken woman with the look of unspeakable sorrow in her large blue eyes.

Certain it is that as soon as Marguerite passed the barrier he put himself on guard against it, with his back to the interior of the cell and to her.

Marguerite had paused on the threshold.

After the glaring light of the guard-room the cell seemed dark, and at first she could hardly see. The whole length of the long, narrow cubicle lay to the left, with a slight recess at its further end, so that from the threshold of the doorway she could not see into the distant corner. Swift as a lightning flash the remembrance came back to her of proud Marie Antoinette narrowing her life to that dark corner where the insolent eyes of the rabble soldiery could not spy her every movement.

Marguerite stepped further into the room. Gradually, by the dim light of an oil lamp placed upon a table in the recess, she began to distinguish various objects: one or two chairs, another table, and a small but very comfortable-looking camp bedstead.

Just for a few seconds she only saw those inanimate things, then she became conscious of Percy's presence.

He sat on a chair, with his left arm half-stretched out upon the table, his head hidden in the bend of the elbow.

Marguerite did not utter a cry; she did not even tremble. Just for one brief instant she closed her eyes, so as to gather up all her courage before she dared to look again. Then with a steady and noiseless step she came quite close to him. She knelt on the flagstones at his feet, and raised reverently to her lips the hand that hung nerveless and limp by his side.

He gave a start; a shiver seemed to go right through him; he half raised his head and murmured in a hoarse whisper:

"I tell you that I do not know, and if I did——"

She put her arms round him and pillowed her head upon his breast. He turned his head slowly toward her, and now his eyes—hollowed and rimmed with purple—looked straight into hers.

"My beloved," he said, "I knew that you would come."

His arms closed round her. There was nothing of lifelessness or of weariness in the passion of that embrace; and when she looked up again it seemed to her as if that first vision which she had had of him, with weary head bent, and wan, haggard face, was not reality, only a dream born of her own anxiety for him; for now the hot, ardent blood coursed just as swiftly as ever through his veins, as if life—strong, tenacious, pulsating life—throbbed with unabated vigour in those massive limbs, and behind that square, clear brow, as though the body, but half subdued, had transferred its vanishing strength to the kind and noble heart that was beating with the fervour of self-sacrifice.

"Percy," she said gently, "they will only give us a few moments together. They thought that my tears would break your spirit where their devilry had failed."

He held her glance with his own, with that close, intent look which binds soul to soul, and in his deep blue eyes there danced the restless flames of his own undying mirth:

"La! little woman," he said with enforced lightness, even whilst his voice quivered with the intensity of passion engendered by her presence, her nearness, the perfume of her hair, "how little they know you, eh? Your brave, beautiful, exquisite soul shining now through your glorious eyes, would defy the machinations of Satan himself and his horde. Close your dear eyes, my love. I shall go mad with joy if I drink their beauty in any longer."

He held her face between his two hands, and indeed it seemed as if he could not satiate his soul with looking into her eyes. In the midst of so much sorrow, such misery, and such deadly fear, never had Marguerite felt quite so happy, never had she felt him so completely her own. The inevitable bodily weakness, which had invaded even his splendid physique after a whole week's privations, had made a severe breach in the invincible barrier of self-control with which the soul of the inner man was kept perpetually hidden behind a mask of indifference and of irresponsibility.

And yet the agony of seeing the lines of sorrow so plainly writ on the beautiful face of the woman he worshipped must have been the keenest that the bold adventurer had ever experienced in the whole course of his reckless life. It was he—and he alone—who was making her suffer; her for whose sake he would gladly have shed every drop of his blood, endured every torment, every misery, and every humiliation; her whom he worshipped only one degree less than he worshipped his honour and the cause which he had made his own.

Yet in spite of that agony, in spite of the heart-rending pathos of her pale, wan face, and through the anguish of seeing her tears, the ruling passion—strong in death—the spirit of adventure, the mad, wild, devil-may-care irresponsibility, was never wholly absent.

"Dear heart," he said with a quaint sigh, whilst he buried his face in the soft masses of her hair, "until you came I was so d——d fatigued."

He was laughing, and the old look of boyish love of mischief illumined his haggard face.

"Is it not lucky, dear heart," he said a moment or two later, "that those brutes do not leave me unshaved? I could not have faced you with a week's growth of beard round my chin. By dint of promises and bribery I have persuaded one of that rabble to come and shave me every morning. They will not allow me to handle a razor myself. They are afraid I should cut my throat—or one of theirs. But mostly I am too d——d sleepy to think of such a thing."

"Percy!" she exclaimed, with tender and passionate reproach.

"I know—I know, dear," he murmured, "what a brute I am! Ah, God did a cruel thing the day that He threw me in your path. To think that once—not so very long ago—we were drifting apart, you and I. You would have suffered less, dear heart, if we had continued to drift."

Then as he saw that his bantering tone pained her, he covered her hands with kisses, entreating her forgiveness.

"Dear heart," he said merrily, "I deserve that you should leave me to rot in this abominable cage. They haven't got me yet, little woman, you know; I am not yet dead—only d——d sleepy at times. But I'll cheat them even now, never fear."

"How, Percy—how?" she moaned, for her heart was aching with intolerable pain; she knew better than he did the precautions which were being taken against his escape, and she saw more clearly than he realized it himself the terrible barrier set up against that escape by ever-encroaching physical weakness.

"Well, dear," he said simply, "to tell you the truth, I have not yet thought of that all-important 'how.' I had to wait, you see, until you came. I was so sure that you would come! I have succeeded in putting on paper all my instructions to Ffoulkes, and the others. I will give them to you anon. I knew that you would come, and that I could give them to you; until then I had but to think of one thing, and that was of keeping body and soul together. My chance of seeing you was to let them have their will with me. Those brutes were sure, sooner or later, to bring you to me, that you might see the caged fox worn down to imbecility, eh? That you might add your tears to their persuasion, and succeed where they have failed."

He laughed lightly with an unstrained note of gaiety, only Marguerite's sensitive ears caught the faint tone of bitterness which rang through the laugh.

"Once I know that the little King of France is safe," he said, "I can think of how best to rob those d——d murderers of my skin."

Then suddenly his manner changed. He still held her with one arm closely to him, but the other now lay across the table, and the slender, emaciated hand was tightly clutched. He did not look at her, but straight ahead; the eyes, unnaturally large now, with their deep purple rims, looked far ahead beyond the stone walls of this grim, cruel prison.

The passionate lover, hungering for his beloved, had vanished; there sat the man with a purpose, the man whose firm hand had snatched men and women and children from death, the reckless enthusiast who tossed his life against an ideal.

For a while he sat thus, while in his drawn and haggard face she could trace every line formed by his thoughts—the frown of anxiety, the resolute setting of the lips, the obstinate look of will around the firm jaw. Then he turned again to her.

"My beautiful one," he said softly, "the moments are very precious. God knows I could spend eternity thus with your dear form nestling against my heart. But those d——d murderers will only give us half an hour, and I want your help, my beloved, now that I am a helpless cur caught in their trap. Will you listen attentively, dear heart, to what I am going to say?"

"Yes, Percy, I will listen," she replied.

"And have you the courage to do just what I tell you, dear?"

"I would not have courage to do aught else," she said simply.

"It means going from hence to-day, dear heart, and perhaps not meeting again. Hush-sh-sh, my beloved," he said, tenderly placing his thin hand over her mouth, from which a sharp cry of pain had well-nigh escaped; "your exquisite soul will be with me always. Try—try not to give way to despair. Why! your love alone, which I see shining from your dear eyes is enough to make a man cling to life with all his might. Tell me! will you do as I ask you?"

And she replied firmly and courageously:

"I will do just what you ask, Percy."

"God bless you for your courage, dear. You will have need of it."

29

FOR THE SAKE OF THAT HELPLESS INNOCENT

The next instant he was kneeling on the floor and his hands were wandering over the small, irregular flag-stones immediately underneath the table. Marguerite had risen to her feet; she watched her husband with intent and puzzled eyes; she saw him suddenly pass his slender fingers along a crevice between two flagstones, then raise one of these slightly, and from beneath it extract a small bundle of papers, each carefully folded and sealed. Then he replaced the stone and once more rose to his knees.

He gave a quick glance toward the doorway. That corner of his cell, the recess wherein stood the table, was invisible to anyone who had not actually crossed the threshold. Reassured that his movements could not have been and were not watched, he drew Marguerite closer to him.

"Dear heart," he whispered, "I want to place these papers in your care. Look upon them as my last will and testament. I succeeded in fooling those brutes one day by pretending to be willing to accede to their will. They gave me pen and ink and paper and wax, and I was to write out an order to my followers to bring the Dauphin hither. They left me in peace for one quarter of an hour, which gave me time to write three letters—one for Armand and the other two for Ffoulkes, and to hide them under the flooring of my cell. You see, dear, I knew that you would come and that I could give them to you then."

He paused, and that ghost of a smile once more hovered round his lips. He was thinking of that day when he had fooled Héron and Chauvelin into the belief that their devilry had succeeded, and that they had brought the reckless adventurer to his knees. He smiled at the recollection of their wrath when they knew that they had been tricked, and after a quarter of an hour's anxious waiting found a few sheets of paper scribbled over with incoherent words or satirical verse, and the prisoner having apparently snatched ten minutes' sleep, which seemingly had restored to him quite a modicum of his strength.

But of this he told Marguerite nothing, nor of the insults and the humiliation which he had had to bear in consequence of that trick. He did not tell her that directly afterwards the order went forth that the prisoner was to be kept on bread and water in the future, nor that Chauvelin had stood by laughing and jeering while . . .

No! he did not tell her all that; the recollection of it all had still the power to make him laugh; was it not all a part and parcel of that great gamble for human lives wherein he had held the winning cards himself for so long?

"It is your turn now," he had said even then to his bitter enemy.

"Yes!" Chauvelin had replied, "our turn at last. An you will not bend, my fine English gentleman, we'll break you yet, never fear."

It was the thought of it all, of that hand-to-hand, will-to-will, spirit-to-spirit struggle that lighted up his haggard face even now, gave him a fresh zest for life, a desire to combat and to conquer in spite of all, in spite of the odds that had martyred his body, but left the mind, the will, the power still unconquered.

He was pressing one of the papers into her hand, holding her fingers tightly in his, and compelling her gaze with the ardent excitement of his own.

"This first letter is for Ffoulkes," he said. "It relates to the final measures for the safety of the Dauphin. They are my instructions to those members of the League who are in or near Paris at the present moment. Ffoulkes, I know, must be with you—he was not likely, God bless his loyalty! to let you come to Paris alone. Then give this letter to him, dear heart, at once, to-night, and tell him that it is my express command that he and the others shall act in minute accordance with my instructions."

"But the Dauphin surely is safe now," she urged. "Ffoulkes and the others are here in order to help you."

"To help me, dear heart?" he interposed earnestly. "God alone can do that now, and such of my poor wits as these devils do not succeed in crushing out of me within the next ten days."

"Ten days!"

"I have waited a week, until this hour when I could place this packet in your hands; another ten days should see the Dauphin out of France—after that, we shall see."

"Percy," she exclaimed in an agony of horror, "you cannot endure this another ten days—and live!"

"Nay!" he said in a tone that was almost insolent in its proud defiance, "there is but little that a man cannot do an he sets his mind to it. For the rest, 'tis in God's hands!" he added more gently. "Dear heart! you swore that you would be brave. The Dauphin is still in France, and until he is out of it he will not really be safe. His friends wanted to keep him inside the country! God only knows what they still hope; had I been free I should not have allowed him to remain so long; now those good people at Mantes will yield to my letter and to Ffoulkes's earnest appeal

—they will allow one of our League to convey the child safely out of France, and I'll wait here until I know that he is safe. If I tried to get away now, and succeeded—why, Heaven help us! the hue and cry might turn against the child, and he might be captured before I could get to him. Dear heart! dear, dear heart! try to understand! The safety of that child is bound with mine honour, but I swear to you, my sweet love, that the day on which I feel that that safety is assured I will save mine own skin—what there is left of it—if I can!"

"Percy!" she cried with a sudden outburst of passionate revolt, "you speak as if the safety of that child were of more moment than your own. Ten days!—but, God in Heaven! have you thought how I shall live these ten days, whilst slowly, inch by inch, you give your dear, your precious life for a forlorn cause?"

"I am very tough, m'dear," he said lightly; "'tis not a question of life. I shall only be spending a few more very uncomfortable days in this d——d hole; but what of that?"

Her eyes spoke the reply; her eyes veiled with tears, that wandered with heart-breaking anxiety from the hollow circles round his own to the lines of weariness about the firm lips and jaw. He laughed at her solicitude.

"I can last out longer than these brutes have any idea of," he said gaily.

"You cheat yourself, Percy," she rejoined with quiet earnestness. "Every day that you spend immured between these walls, with that ceaseless nerve-racking torment of sleeplessness which these devils have devised for the breaking of your will—every day thus spent diminishes your power of ultimately saving yourself. You see I speak calmly—dispassionately—I do not even urge my claims upon your life. But what you must weigh in the balance is the claim of all those for whom in the past you have already staked your life, whose lives you have purchased by risking your own. What, in comparison with your noble life, is that of the puny descendant of a line of decadent kings? Why should it be sacrificed—ruthlessly, hopelessly sacrificed—that a boy might live who is as nothing to the world, to his country—even to his own people?"

She had tried to speak calmly, never raising her voice beyond a whisper. Her hands still clutched that paper, which seemed to sear her fingers, the paper which she felt held writ upon its smooth surface the death-sentence of the man she loved.

But his look did not answer her firm appeal; it was fixed far away beyond the prison walls on a lonely country road outside Paris, with the rain falling in a thin drizzle and leaden clouds overhead chasing one another, driven by the gale.

"Poor mite," he murmured softly; "he walked so bravely by my side, until the little feet grew weary; then he nestled in my arms and slept until we met Ffoulkes waiting with the cart. He was no King of France just then, only a helpless innocent whom Heaven aided me to save."

Marguerite bowed her head in silence. There was nothing more that she could say, no plea that she could urge. Indeed, she had understood, as he had begged her to understand. She understood that long ago he had mapped out the course of his life, and now that that course happened to lead up to a Calvary of humiliation and of suffering, he was not likely to turn back, even though on the summit death already was waiting and beckoning with no uncertain hand; not until he could murmur, in the wake of the great and divine sacrifice itself, the sublime words: "It is accomplished."

"But the Dauphin is safe enough now!" was all that she said, after that one moment's silence when her heart, too, had offered up to God the supreme abnegation of self, and calmly faced a sorrow which threatened to break it at last.

"Yes!" he rejoined quietly, "safe enough for the moment. But he would be safer still if he were out of France. I had hoped to take him one day with me to England. But in this plan damnable Fate has interfered. His adherents wanted to get him to Vienna, and their wish had best be fulfilled now. In my instructions to Ffoulkes I have mapped out a simple way for accomplishing the journey. Tony will be the one best suited to lead the expedition, and I want him to make straight for Holland; the Northern frontiers are not so closely watched as are the Austrian ones. There is a faithful adherent of the Bourbon cause who lives at Delft, and who will give the shelter of his name and home to the fugitive King of France until he can be conveyed to Vienna: he has name Naundorff. Once I feel that the child is safe in his hands I will look after myself, never fear."

He paused, for his strength, which was only factitious, born of the excitement that Marguerite's presence had called forth, was threatening to give way. His voice, though he had spoken in a whisper all along, was very hoarse, and his temples were throbbing with the sustained effort to speak.

"If those fiends had only thought of denying me food instead of sleep," he murmured involuntarily, "I could have held out until——"

Then with characteristic swiftness his mood changed in a moment. His arms closed round Marguerite once more with a passion of self-reproach.

"Heaven forgive me for a selfish brute," he said, whilst the ghost of a smile once more lit up the whole of his face. "Dear soul, I must have forgotten your sweet presence, thus brooding over my own troubles whilst your loving heart has a graver burden—God help me!—than it can possibly bear. Listen, my beloved, for I don't know how many minutes longer they intend to give us, and I have not yet spoken to you about Armand——"

"Armand!" she cried.

A twinge of remorse had gripped her. For fully ten minutes now she had relegated all thoughts of her brother to a distant cell of her memory.

"We have no news of Armand," she said. "Sir Andrew has searched all the prison registers. Oh! were not my heart atrophied by all that it has endured this past sennight it would feel a final throb of agonizing pain at every thought of Armand."

A curious look, which even her loving eyes failed to interpret, passed like a shadow over her husband's face. But the shadow lifted in a moment, and it was with a reassuring smile that he said to her:

"Dear heart! Armand is comparatively safe for the moment. Tell Ffoulkes not to search the prison registers for him, rather to seek out Mademoiselle Lange. She will know where to find Armand."

"Jeanne Lange!" she exclaimed with a world of bitterness in the tone of her voice, "the girl whom Armand loved, it seems, with a passion greater than his loyalty. Oh! Sir Andrew tried to disguise my brother's folly, but I guessed what he did not choose to tell me. It was his disobedience, his want of trust, that brought this unspeakable misery on us all."

"Do not blame him overmuch, dear heart. Armand was in love, and love excuses every sin committed in its name. Jeanne Lange was arrested and Armand lost his reason temporarily. The very day on which I rescued the Dauphin from the Temple I had the good fortune to drag the little lady out of prison. I had given my promise to Armand that she should be safe, and I kept my word. But this Armand did not know—or else——"

He checked himself abruptly, and once more that strange, enigmatical look crept into his eyes.

"I took Jeanne Lange to a place of comparative safety," he said after a slight pause, "but since then she has been set entirely free."

"Free?"

"Yes. Chauvelin himself brought me the news," he replied with a quick, mirthless laugh, wholly unlike his usual light-hearted gaiety. "He had to ask me where to find Jeanne, for I alone knew where she was. As for Armand, they'll not worry about him whilst I am here. Another reason why I must bide a while longer. But in the meanwhile, dear, I pray you find Mademoiselle Lange; she lives at No. 5 Square du Roule. Through her I know that you can get to see Armand. This second letter," he added, pressing a smaller packet into her hand, "is for him. Give it to him, dear heart; it will, I hope, tend to cheer him. I fear me the poor lad frets; yet he only sinned because he loved, and to me he will always be your brother—the man who held your affection for all the years before I came into your life. Give him this letter, dear; they are my instructions to him, as the others are for Ffoulkes; but tell him to read them when he is all alone. You will do that, dear heart, will you not?"

"Yes, Percy," she said simply. "I promise."

Great joy, and the expression of intense relief, lit up his face, whilst his eyes spoke the gratitude which he felt.

"Then there is one thing more," he said. "There are others in this cruel city, dear heart, who have trusted me, and whom I must not fail—Marie de Marmontel and her brother, faithful servants of the late Queen; they were on the eve of arrest when I succeeded in getting them to a place of comparative safety; and there are others there, too—all of these poor victims have trusted me implicitly. They are waiting for me, trusting in my promise to convey them safely to England. Sweetheart, you must redeem my promise to them. You will?—you will? Promise me that you will——"

"I promise, Percy," she said once more.

"Then go, dear, to-morrow, in the late afternoon, to No. 98 Rue de Charonne. It is a narrow house at the extreme end of that long street which abuts on the fortifications. The lower part of the house is occupied by a dealer in rags and old clothes. He and his wife and family are wretchedly poor, but they are kind, good souls, and for a consideration and a minimum of risk to themselves they will always render service to the English milors, whom they believe to be a band of inveterate smugglers. Ffoulkes and all the others know these people and know the house; Armand by the same token knows it too. Marie de Marmontel and her brother are there, and several others; the old Comte de Lézardière, the Abbé de Firmont; their names spell suffering, loyalty, and hopelessness. I was lucky enough to convey them safely to that hidden shelter. They trust me implicitly, dear heart. They are waiting for me there, trusting in my promise to them. Dear heart, you will go, will you not?"

"Yes, Percy," she replied. "I will go; I have promised."

"Ffoulkes has some certificates of safety by him, and the old clothes dealer will supply the necessary disguises; he has a covered cart which he uses for his business, and which you can borrow from him. Ffoulkes will drive the little party to Achard's farm in St. Germain, where other members of the League should be in waiting for the final journey to England. Ffoulkes will know how to arrange for everything; he was always my most able lieutenant. Once everything is organized he can appoint Hastings to lead the party. But you, dear heart, must do as you wish. Achard's farm would be a safe retreat for you and for Ffoulkes if . . . I know—I know, dear," he added, with infinite tenderness. "See! I do not even suggest that you should leave me. Ffoulkes will be with you, and I know that neither he nor you would go even if I commanded. Either Achard's farm, or even the house in the Rue de Charonne, would be quite safe for you, dear, under Ffoulkes's protection, until the time when I myself can carry you back—you, my precious burden—to England in mine own arms, or until . . . Hush-sh-sh, dear heart," he entreated, smothering with a passionate kiss the low moan of pain which had escaped her lips; "it is all in God's hands now; I am in a tight corner—tighter than ever I have been before; but I am not dead yet, and those brutes have not yet paid the full price for my life. Tell me, dear heart, that you have understood—that you will do all that I asked. Tell me again, my dear,

dear love; it is the very essence of life to hear your sweet lips murmur this promise now."

And for the third time she reiterated firmly:

"I have understood every word that you said to me, Percy, and I promise on your precious life to do what you ask."

He uttered a deep sigh of satisfaction, and even at that moment there came from the guard-room beyond the sound of a harsh voice, saying peremptorily:

"That half-hour is nearly over, sergeant; 'tis time you interfered."

"Three minutes more, citizen," was the curt reply.

"Three minutes, you devils," murmured Blakeney between set teeth, whilst a sudden light which even Marguerite's keen gaze failed to interpret leapt into his eyes. Then he pressed the third letter into her hand.

Once more his close, intent gaze compelled hers; their faces were close one to the other, so near to him did he draw her, so tightly did he hold her to him. The paper was in her hand and his fingers were pressed firmly on hers.

"Put this in your kerchief, my beloved," he whispered. "Let it rest on your exquisite bosom where I so love to pillow my head. Keep it there until the last hour when it seems to you that nothing more can come between me and shame. . . . Hush-sh-sh, dear," he added with passionate tenderness, checking the hot protest that at the word "shame" had sprung to her lips, "I cannot explain more fully now. I do not know what may happen. I am only a man, and who knows what subtle devilry those brutes might not devise for bringing the untamed adventurer to his knees. For the next ten days the Dauphin will be on the high-roads of France, on his way to safety.

Every stage of his journey will be known to me. I can from between these four walls follow him and his escort step by step. Well, dear, I am but a man, already brought to shameful weakness by mere physical discomfort—the want of sleep—such a trifle after all; but in case my reason tottered—God knows what I might do—then give this packet to Ffoulkes—it contains my final instructions—and he will know how to act. Promise me, dear heart, that you will not open the packet unless—unless mine own dishonour seems to you imminent—unless I have yielded to these brutes in this prison, and sent Ffoulkes or one of the others orders to exchange the Dauphin's life for mine; then, when mine own handwriting hath proclaimed me a coward, then and then only, give this packet to Ffoulkes. Promise me that, and also that when you and he have mastered its contents you will act exactly as I have commanded. Promise me that, dear, in your own sweet name, which may God bless, and in that of Ffoulkes, our loyal friend."

Through the sobs that wellnigh choked her she murmured the promise he desired.

His voice had grown hoarser and more spent with the inevitable reaction after the long and sustained effort, but the vigour of the spirit was untouched, the fervour, the enthusiasm.

"Dear heart," he murmured, "do not look on me with those dear, scared eyes of yours. If there is aught that puzzles you in what I said, try and trust me a while longer. Remember, I must save the Dauphin at all costs; mine honour is bound with his safety. What happens to me after that matters but little, yet I wish to live for your dear sake."

He drew a long breath which had naught of weariness in it. The haggard look had completely vanished from his face, the eyes were lighted up from within, the very soul of reckless daring and immortal gaiety illumined his whole personality.

"Do not look so sad, little woman," he said, with a strange and sudden recrudescence of power; "those d——d murderers have not got me yet—even now."

Then he went down like a log.

The effort had been too prolonged—weakened nature reasserted her rights—and he lost consciousness. Marguerite, helpless and almost distraught with grief, had yet the strength of mind not to call for assistance. She pillowed the loved one's head upon her breast, she kissed the dear, tired eyes, the poor throbbing temples. The unutterable pathos of seeing this man, who was always the personification of extreme vitality, energy, and boundless endurance and pluck, lying thus helpless, like a tired child, in her arms, was perhaps the saddest moment of this day of sorrow. But in her trust she never wavered for one instant. Much that he had said had puzzled her; but the word "shame" coming from his own lips as a comment on himself never caused her the slightest pang of fear. She had quickly hidden the tiny packet in her kerchief. She would act point by point exactly as he had ordered her to do, and she knew that Ffoulkes would never waver either.

Her heart ached wellnigh to breaking point. That which she could not understand had increased her anguish tenfold. If she could only have given way to tears she could have borne this final agony more easily. But the solace of tears was not for her; when those loved eyes once more opened to consciousness they should see hers glowing with courage and determination.

There had been silence for a few minutes in the little cell. The soldiery outside, inured to their hideous duty, thought no doubt that the time had come for them to interfere.

The iron bar was raised and thrown back with a loud crash, the butt-ends of muskets were grounded against the floor, and two soldiers made noisy irruption into the cell.

"Holà, citizen! Wake up," shouted one of the men; "you have not told us yet what you have done with Capet!"

Marguerite uttered a cry of horror. Instinctively her arms were interposed between the unconscious man and these inhuman creatures, with a beautiful gesture of protecting motherhood.

"He has fainted," she said, her voice quivering with indignation. "My God! are you devils that you have not one spark of manhood in you?"

The men shrugged their shoulders, and both laughed brutally. They had seen worse sights than this, since they served a Republic that ruled by bloodshed and by terror. They were own brothers in callousness and cruelty to those men who on this selfsame spot a few months ago had watched the daily agony of a martyred Queen, or to those who had rushed into the Abbaye Prison on that awful day in September, and at a word from their infamous leaders had put eighty defenceless prisoners—men, women, and children—to the sword.

"Tell him to say what he has done with Capet," said one of the soldiers now, and this rough command was accompanied with a coarse jest that sent the blood flaring up into Marguerite's pale cheeks.

The brutal laugh, the coarse words which accompanied it, the insult flung at Marguerite, had penetrated to Blakeney's slowly returning consciousness.

With sudden strength, that appeared almost supernatural, he jumped to his feet, and before any of the others could interfere he had with clenched fist struck the soldier a full blow on the mouth.

The man staggered back with a curse, the other shouted for help; in a moment the narrow place swarmed with soldiers; Marguerite was roughly torn away from the prisoner's side, and thrust into the far corner of the cell, from where she only saw a confused mass of blue coats and white belts, and—towering for one brief moment above what seemed to her fevered fancy like a veritable sea of heads—the pale face of her husband, with widely-dilated eyes searching the gloom for hers.

"Remember!" he shouted, and his voice for that brief moment rang out clear and sharp above the din.

Then he disappeared behind the wall of glistening bayonets, of blue coats and uplifted arms; mercifully for her she remembered nothing more very clearly. She felt herself being dragged out of the cell, the iron bar being thrust down behind her with a loud clang. Then in a vague, dreamy state of semi-unconsciousness she saw the heavy bolts being drawn back from the outer door, heard the grating of the key in the monumental lock, and the next moment a breath of fresh air brought the sensation of renewed life into her.

30

AFTERWARDS

"I AM sorry, Lady Blakeney," said a harsh, dry voice close to her; "the incident at the end of your visit was none of our making, remember."

She turned away, sickened with horror at thought of contact with this wretch. She had heard the heavy oaken door swing to behind her on its ponderous hinges, and the key once again turn in the lock. She felt as if she had suddenly been thrust into a coffin, and that clods of earth were being thrown upon her breast, oppressing her heart so that she could not breathe.

Had she looked for the last time on the man whom she loved beyond everything else on earth, whom she worshipped more ardently day by day? Was she even now carrying within the folds of her kerchief a message from a dying man to his comrades?

Mechanically she followed Chauvelin down the corridor and along the passages which she had traversed a brief half-hour ago. From some distant church tower a clock tolled the hour of ten. It had then really only been little more than thirty brief minutes since first she had entered this grim building, which seemed less stony than the monsters who held authority within it; to her it seemed that centuries had gone over her head during that time. She felt like an old woman, unable to straighten her back or to steady her limbs; she could only dimly see some few paces ahead the trim figure of Chauvelin walking with measured steps, his hands held behind his back, his head thrown up with what looked like triumphant defiance.

At the door of the cubicle where she had been forced to submit to the indignity of being searched by a wardress, the latter was now standing, waiting with characteristic stolidity. In her hand she held the steel files, the dagger and the purse which, as Marguerite passed, she held out to her.

"Your property, citizeness," she said placidly.

She emptied the purse into her own hand, and solemnly counted out the twenty pieces of gold. She was about to replace them all into the purse, when Marguerite pressed one of them back into her wrinkled hand.

"Nineteen will be enough, citizeness," she said; "keep one for yourself, not only for me, but for all the poor women who come here with their heart full of hope, and go hence with it full of despair."

The woman turned calm, lack-lustre eyes on her, and silently pocketed the gold piece with a grudgingly-muttered word of thanks.

Chauvelin, during this brief interlude, had walked thoughtlessly on ahead. Marguerite, peering down the length of the narrow corridor, spied his sable-clad figure some hundred mètres further on as it crossed the dim circle of light thrown by one of the lamps.

She was about to follow, when it seemed to her as if some one was moving in the darkness close beside her. The wardress was even now in the act of closing the door of her cubicle, and there were a couple of soldiers who were disappearing from view round one end of the passage, whilst Chauvelin's retreating form was lost in the gloom at the other.

There was no light close to where she herself was standing, and the blackness around her was as impenetrable as a veil; the sound of a human creature moving and breathing close to her in this intense darkness acted weirdly on her overwrought nerves.

"Qui va là?" she called.

There was a more distinct movement among the shadows this time, as of a swift tread on the flagstones of the corridor. All else was silent round her, and now she could plainly hear those footsteps running rapidly down the passage away from her. She strained her eyes to see more clearly, and anon in one of the dim circles of light on ahead she spied a man's figure—slender and darkly clad—walking quickly yet furtively like one pursued. As he crossed the light the man turned to look back. It was her brother Armand.

Her first instinct was to call to him; the second checked that call upon her lips.

Percy had said that Armand was in no danger; then why should he be sneaking along the dark corridors of this awful house of Justice if he was free and safe?

Certainly, even at a distance, her brother's movements suggested to Marguerite that he was in danger of being seen. He cowered in the darkness, tried to avoid the circles of light thrown by the lamps in the passage. At all costs Marguerite felt that she must warn him that the way he was going now would lead him straight into Chauvelin's arms, and she longed to let him know that she was close by.

Feeling sure that he would recognize her voice, she made pretence to turn back to the cubicle through the door of which the wardress had already disappeared, and called out as loudly as she dared:

"Good night, citizeness!"

But Armand—who surely must have heard—did not pause at the sound. Rather was he walking on now more rapidly than before. In less than a minute he would be reaching the spot where Chauvelin stood waiting for Marguerite. That end of the corridor, however, received no light from any of the lamps; strive how she might, Marguerite could see nothing now either of Chauvelin or of Armand.

Blindly, instinctively, she ran forward, thinking only to reach Armand, and to warn him to turn back before it was too late; before he found himself face to face with the most bitter enemy he and his nearest and dearest had ever had. But as she at last came to a halt at the end of the corridor, panting with the exertion of running and the fear for Armand, she almost fell up against Chauvelin, who was standing there alone and imperturbable, seemingly having waited patiently for her. She could only dimly distinguish his face, the sharp features and thin, cruel mouth, but she felt—more than she actually saw—his cold, steely eyes fixed with a strange expression of mockery upon her.

But of Armand there was no sign, and she—poor soul!—had difficulty in not betraying the anxiety which she felt for her brother. Had the flagstones swallowed him up? A door on the right was the only one that gave on the corridor at this point; it led to the concierge's lodge, and thence out into the courtyard. Had Chauvelin been dreaming, sleeping with his eyes open, whilst he stood waiting for her, and had Armand succeeded in slipping past him under cover of the darkness and through that door to safety that lay beyond these prison walls?

Marguerite, miserably agitated, not knowing what to think, looked somewhat wild-eyed on Chauvelin; he smiled, that inscrutable, mirthless smile of his, and said blandly:

"Is there aught else that I can do for you, citizeness? This is your nearest way out. No doubt Sir Andrew will be waiting to escort you home."

Then as she—not daring either to reply or to question—walked straight up to the door, he hurried forward, prepared to open it for her. But before he did so he turned to her once again:

"I trust that your visit has pleased you, Lady Blakeney," he said suavely. "At what hour do you desire to repeat it to-morrow?"

"To-morrow?" she reiterated in a vague, absent manner, for she was still dazed with the strange incident of Armand's appearance and his flight.

"Yes. You would like to see Sir Percy again to-morrow, would you not? I myself would gladly pay him a visit from time to time, but he does not care for my company. My colleague, citizen Héron, on the other hand, calls on him four times in every twenty-four hours; he does so a few moments before the changing of the guard, and stays chatting with Sir Percy until after the guard is changed, when he inspects the men and satisfies himself that no traitor has crept in among them. All the men are personally known to him, you see. These hours are at five in the morning and again at eleven, and then again at five and eleven in the evening. My friend Héron, as you see, is zealous and assiduous, and, strangely enough, Sir Percy does not seem to view his visits with any displeasure. Now at any other hour of the day, Lady Blakeney, I pray you command me and I will arrange that citizen Héron grant you a second interview with the prisoner."

Marguerite had only listened to Chauvelin's lengthy speech with half an ear; her thoughts still dwelt on the past half-hour with its bitter joy and its agonizing pain; and fighting through her thoughts of Percy there was the recollection of Armand which so disquieted her. But though she had only vaguely listened to what Chauvelin was saying, she caught the drift of it.

Madly she longed to accept his suggestion. The very thought of seeing Percy on the morrow was solace to her aching heart; it could feed on hope to-night instead of on its own bitter pain. But even during this brief moment of hesitancy, and while her whole being cried out for this joy that her enemy was holding out to her, even then in the gloom ahead of her she seemed to see a vision of a pale face raised above a crowd of swaying heads, and of the eyes of the dreamer searching for her own, whilst the last sublime cry of perfect self-devotion once more echoed in her ear:

"Remember!"

The promise which she had given him, that would she fulfil. The burden which he had laid on her shoulders she would try to bear as heroically as he was bearing his own. Aye, even at the cost of the supreme sorrow of never resting again in the haven of his arms.

But in spite of sorrow, in spite of anguish so terrible that she could not imagine Death itself to have a more cruel sting, she wished above all to safeguard that final, attenuated thread of hope which was wound round the packet that lay hidden on her breast.

She wanted, above all, not to arouse Chauvelin's suspicions by markedly refusing to visit the prisoner again—suspicions that might lead to her being searched once more and the precious packet filched from her. Therefore she said to him earnestly now:

"I thank you, citizen, for your solicitude on my behalf, but you will understand, I think, that my visit to the prisoner has been almost more than I could bear. I cannot tell you at this moment whether to-morrow I should be in a fit state to repeat it."

"As you please," he replied urbanely. "But I pray you to remember one thing, and that is——"

He paused a moment while his restless eyes wandered rapidly over her face, trying, as it were, to get at the soul of this woman, at her innermost thoughts, which he felt were hidden from him.

"Yes, citizen," she said quietly; "what is it that I am to remember?"

"That it rests with you, Lady Blakeney, to put an end to the present situation."

"How?"

"Surely you can persuade Sir Percy's friends not to leave their chief in durance vile. They themselves could put an end to his troubles to-morrow."

"By giving up the Dauphin to you, you mean?" she retorted coldly.

"Precisely."

"And you hoped—you still hope that by placing before me the picture of your own fiendish cruelty against my husband you will induce me to act the part of a traitor towards him and a coward before his followers?"

"Oh!" he said deprecatingly, "the cruelty now is no longer mine. Sir Percy's release is in your hands, Lady Blakeney—in those of his followers. I should only be too willing to end the present intolerable situation. You and your friends are applying the last turn of the thumbscrew, not I——"

She smothered the cry of horror that had risen to her lips. The man's cold-blooded sophistry was threatening to make a breach in her armour of self-control.

She would no longer trust herself to speak, but made a quick movement towards the door.

He shrugged his shoulders as if the matter were now entirely out of his control. Then he opened the door for her to pass out, and as her skirts brushed against him he bowed with studied deference, murmuring a cordial "Good night!"

"And remember, Lady Blakeney," he added politely, "that should you at any time desire to communicate with me at my rooms, 19 Rue Dupuy, I hold myself entirely at your service."

Then as her tall, graceful figure disappeared in the outside gloom he passed his thin hand over his mouth as if to wipe away the last lingering signs of triumphant irony:

"The second visit will work wonders, I think, my fine lady," he murmured under his breath.

31

AN INTERLUDE

It was close on midnight now, and still they sat opposite one another, he the friend and she the wife, talking over that brief half-hour that had meant an eternity to her.

Marguerite had tried to tell Sir Andrew everything; bitter as it was to put into actual words the pathos and misery which she had witnessed, yet she would hide nothing from the devoted comrade whom she knew Percy would trust absolutely. To him she repeated every word that Percy had uttered, described every inflection of his voice, those enigmatical phrases which she had not understood, and together they cheated one another into the belief that hope lingered somewhere hidden in those words.

"I am not going to despair, Lady Blakeney," said Sir Andrew firmly; "and, moreover, we are not going to disobey. I would stake my life that even now Blakeney has some scheme in his mind which is embodied in the various letters which he has given you, and which—Heaven help us in that case!—we might thwart by disobedience. To-morrow in the late afternoon I will escort you to the Rue de Charonne.

It is a house that we all know well, and which Armand, of course, knows too. I had already inquired there two days ago to ascertain whether by chance St. Just was not in hiding there, but Lucas, the landlord and old-clothes dealer, knew nothing about him."

Marguerite told him about her swift vision of Armand in the dark corridor of the house of Justice.

"Can you understand it, Sir Andrew?" she asked, fixing her deep, luminous eyes inquiringly upon him.

"No, I cannot," he said, after an almost imperceptible moment of hesitancy; "but we shall see him to-morrow. I have no doubt that Mademoiselle Lange will know where to find him; and now that we know where she is, all our anxiety about him, at any rate, should soon be at an end."

He rose and made some allusion to the lateness of the hour. Somehow it seemed to her that her devoted friend was trying to hide his innermost thoughts from her. She watched him with an anxious, intent gaze.

"Can you understand it all, Sir Andrew?" she reiterated with a pathetic note of appeal.

"No, no!" he said firmly. "On my soul, Lady Blakeney, I know no more of Armand than you do yourself. But I am sure that Percy is right. The boy frets because remorse must have assailed him by now. Had he but obeyed implicitly that day, as we all did——"

But he could not frame the whole terrible proposition into words. Bitterly as he himself felt on the subject of Armand, he would not add yet another burden to this devoted woman's heavy load of misery.

"It was Fate, Lady Blakeney," he said after a while. "Fate! a damnable fate which did it all. Great God! to think of Blakeney in the hands of those brutes seems so horrible that at times I feel as if the whole thing were a nightmare, and that the next moment we shall both wake hearing his merry voice echoing through this room."

He tried to cheer her with words of hope that he knew were but chimeras. A heavy weight of despondency lay on his heart. The letter from his chief was hidden against his breast; he would study it anon in the privacy of his own apartment so as to commit every word to memory that related to the measures for the ultimate safety of the child-King. After that it would have to be destroyed, lest it fell into inimical hands.

Soon he bade Marguerite good night. She was tired out, body and soul, and he—her faithful friend—vaguely wondered how long she would be able to withstand the strain of so much sorrow, such unspeakable misery.

When at last she was alone Marguerite made brave efforts to compose her nerves so as to obtain a certain modicum of sleep that night. But, strive how she might, sleep would not come. How could it? when before her wearied brain there rose constantly that awful vision of Percy in the long, narrow cell, with weary head bent over his arm, those fiends shouting persistently in his ear:

"Wake up, citizen! Tell us, where is Capet?"

The fear obsessed her that his mind might give way; for the mental agony of such intense weariness must be wellnigh impossible to bear. In the dark, as she sat hour after hour at the open window, looking out in the direction where through the veil of snow the grey walls of the Châtelet Prison towered silent and grim, she seemed to see his pale, drawn face with almost appalling reality; she could see every line of it, and could study it with the intensity borne of a terrible fear.

How long would the ghostly glimmer of merriment still linger in the eyes? When would the hoarse, mirthless laugh rise to the lips, that awful laugh that proclaims madness? Oh! she could have screamed now with the awfulness of this haunting terror. Ghouls seemed to be mocking her out of the darkness, every flake of snow that fell silently on the window-sill became a grinning face that taunted and derided; every cry in the silence of the night, every footstep on the quay below turned to hideous jeers hurled at her by tormenting fiends.

She closed the window quickly, for she feared that she would go mad. For an hour after that she walked up and down the room making violent efforts to control her nerves, to find a glimmer of that courage which she promised Percy that she would have.

32

SISTERS

The morning found her fagged out, but more calm. Later on she managed to drink some coffee, and having washed and dressed, she prepared to go out.

Sir Andrew appeared in time to ascertain her wishes.

"I promised Percy to go to the Rue de Charonne in the late afternoon," she said. "I have some hours to spare, and mean to employ them in trying to find speech with Mademoiselle Lange."

"Blakeney has told you where she lives?"

"Yes. In the Square du Roule. I know it well. I can be there in half an hour."

He, of course, begged to be allowed to accompany her, and anon they were walking together quickly up toward the Faubourg St. Honoré. The snow had ceased falling, but it was still very cold, but neither Marguerite nor Sir Andrew were conscious of the temperature or of any outward signs around them. They walked on silently until they reached the torn-down gates of the Square du Roule; there Sir Andrew parted from Marguerite after having appointed to meet her an hour later at a small eating-house he knew of where they could have some food together, before starting on their long expedition to the Rue de Charonne.

Five minutes later Marguerite Blakeney was shown in by worthy Madame Belhomme, into the quaint and pretty drawing-room with its soft-toned hangings and old-world air of faded grace. Mademoiselle Lange was sitting there, in a capacious arm-chair which encircled her delicate figure with its frame-work of dull old gold.

She was ostensibly reading when Marguerite was announced, for an open book lay on a table beside her; but it seemed to the visitor that mayhap the young girl's thoughts had played truant from her work, for her pose was listless and apathetic, and there was a look of grave trouble upon the childlike face.

She rose when Marguerite entered, obviously puzzled at the unexpected visit, and somewhat awed at the appearance of this beautiful woman with the sad look in her eyes.

"I must crave your pardon, Mademoiselle," said Lady Blakeney as soon as the door had once more closed on Madame Belhomme, and she found herself alone with the young girl. "This visit at such an early hour must seem to you an intrusion. But I am Marguerite St. Just, and——"

Her smile and outstretched hand completed the sentence.

"St. Just!" exclaimed Jeanne.

"Yes. Armand's sister!"

A swift blush rushed to the girl's pale cheeks; her brown eyes expressed unadulterated joy. Marguerite, who was studying her closely, was conscious that her poor, aching heart went out to this exquisite child, the far-off innocent cause of so much misery.

Jeanne, a little shy, a little confused and nervous in her movements, was pulling a chair close to the fire, begging Marguerite to sit. Her words came out all the while in short, jerky sentences, and from time to time she stole swift, shy glances at Armand's sister.

"You will forgive me, Mademoiselle," said Marguerite, whose simple and calm manner quickly tended to soothe Jeanne Lange's confusion; "but I was so anxious about my brother—I do not know where to find him."

"And so you came to me, Madame?"

"Was I wrong?"

"Oh, no! But what made you think that—that I would know?"

"I guessed," said Marguerite, with a smile.

"You had heard about me then?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Through whom? Did Armand tell you about me?"

"No, alas! I have not seen him this past fortnight, since you, Mademoiselle, came into his life; but many of Armand's friends are in Paris just now; one of them knew, and he told me."

The soft blush had now overspread the whole of the girl's face, even down to her graceful neck. She waited to see Marguerite comfortably installed in an arm-chair, then she resumed shyly:

"And it was Armand who told me all about you. He loves you so dearly."

"Armand and I were very young children when we lost our parents," said Marguerite softly, "and we were all in all to each other then. And until I married he was the man I loved best in all the world!"

"He told me you were married—to an Englishman."

"Yes?"

"He loves England too. At first he always talked of my going there with him as his wife, and of the happiness we should find there together."

"Why do you say 'at first'?"

"He talks less about England now."

"Perhaps he feels that now you know all about it, and that you understand each other with regard to the future."

"Perhaps."

Jeanne sat opposite to Marguerite on a low stool by the fire. Her elbows were resting on her knees, and her face just now was half-hidden by the wealth of her brown curls. She looked exquisitely pretty sitting like this, with just the suggestion of sadness in the listless pose. Marguerite had come here to-day prepared to hate this young girl, who in a few brief days had stolen not only Armand's heart, but his allegiance to his chief and his trust in him. Since last night, when she had seen her brother sneak silently past her like a thief in the night, she had nurtured thoughts of ill-will and anger against Jeanne.

But hatred and anger had melted at sight of this child. Marguerite, with the perfect understanding born of love itself, had soon realized the charm which a woman like Mademoiselle Lange must of necessity exercise over a chivalrous, enthusiastic nature like Armand's. The sense of protection—the strongest perhaps that exists in a good man's heart—would draw him irresistibly to this beautiful child, with the great, appealing eyes, and the look of pathos that pervaded the entire face. Marguerite, looking in silence on the dainty picture before her, found it in her heart to forgive Armand for disobeying his chief when those eyes beckoned to him in a contrary direction.

How could he, how could any chivalrous man endure the thought of this delicate, fresh flower lying crushed and drooping in the hands of monsters who respected neither courage nor purity? And Armand had been more than human, or mayhap less, if he had indeed consented to leave the fate of the girl whom he had sworn to love and protect in other hands than his own.

It seemed almost as if Jeanne was conscious of the fixity of Marguerite's gaze, for though she did not turn to look at her, the flush gradually deepened in her cheeks.

"Mademoiselle Lange," said Marguerite gently, "do you not feel that you can trust me?"

She held out her two hands to the girl, and Jeanne slowly turned to her. The next moment she was kneeling at Marguerite's feet and kissing the beautiful kind hands that had been stretched out to her with such sisterly love.

"Indeed, indeed, I do trust you," she said, and looked with tear-dimmed eyes in the pale face above her. "I have longed for some one in whom I could confide. I have been so lonely lately, and Armand——"

With an impatient little gesture she brushed away the tears which had gathered in her eyes.

"What has Armand been doing?" asked Marguerite, with an encouraging smile.

"Oh, nothing to grieve me!" replied the young girl eagerly, "for he is kind, and good, and chivalrous and noble. Oh, I love him with all my heart! I loved him from the moment that I set eyes on him, and then he came to see me—perhaps you know! And he talked so beautifully about England, and so nobly about his leader, the Scarlet Pimpernel—have you heard of him?"

"Yes," said Marguerite, smiling. "I have heard of him."

"It was that day that citizen Héron came with his soldiers! Oh! you do not know citizen Héron. He is the most cruel man in France. In Paris he is hated by every one, and no one is safe from his spies. He came to arrest Armand, but I was able to fool him and to save Armand. And after that," she added with charming naïveté, "I felt as if, having saved Armand's life, he belonged to me—and his love for me had made me his."

"Then I was arrested," she continued, after a slight pause, and at the recollection of what she had endured then her fresh voice still trembled with horror.

"They dragged me to prison, and I spent two days in a dark cell, where——"

She hid her face in her hands, whilst a few sobs shook her whole frame; then she resumed more calmly:

"I had seen nothing of Armand. I wondered where he was, and I knew that he would be eating out his heart with anxiety for me. But God was watching over me. At first I was transferred to the Temple Prison, and there a kind creature—a sort of man-of-all-work in the prison—took compassion on me. I do not know how he contrived it, but one morning very early he brought me some filthy old rags which he told me to put on quickly, and when I had done that he bade me follow him. Oh! he was a very dirty, wretched man himself, but he must have had a kind heart. He took me by the hand and made me carry his broom and brushes. Nobody took much notice of us, the dawn was only just breaking, and the passages were very dark and deserted; only once some soldiers began to chaff him about me: 'C'est ma fille—quoi?' he said roughly. I very nearly laughed then, only I had the good sense to restrain myself, for I knew that my freedom, and perhaps my life, depended on my not betraying myself. My grimy, tattered guide took me with him right through the interminable corridors of that awful building, whilst I prayed fervently to God for him and for myself. We got out by one of the service stairs and exit, and then he dragged me through some narrow streets until we came to a corner where a covered cart stood waiting. My kind friend told me to get into the cart, and then he bade the driver on the box take me straight to a house in the Rue St. Germain l'Auxerrois. Oh! I was infinitely grateful to the poor creature who had helped me to get out of that awful prison, and I would gladly have given him some money, for I am sure he was very poor; but I had none by me. He told me that I should be quite safe in the house in the Rue St. Germain l'Auxerrois, and begged me to wait there patiently for a few days, until I heard from one who had my welfare at heart, and who would further arrange for my safety."

Marguerite had listened silently to this narrative so naïvely told by this child, who obviously had no idea to whom she owed her freedom and her life. While the girl talked, her mind could follow with unspeakable pride and happiness every phase of that scene in the early dawn when that mysterious, ragged man-of-all-work, unbeknown even to the woman whom he was saving, risked his own noble life for the sake of her whom his friend and comrade loved.

"And did you never see again the kind man to whom you owe your life?" she asked.

"No!" replied Jeanne. "I never saw him since; but when I arrived at the Rue St. Germain l'Auxerrois I was told by the good people who took charge of me that the ragged man-of-all-work had been none other than the mysterious Englishman whom Armand reveres, he whom they call the Scarlet Pimpernel."

"But you did not stay very long in the Rue St. Germain l'Auxerrois, did you?"

"No. Only three days. The third day I received a communiqué from the Committee of General Security, together with an unconditional certificate of safety. It meant that I was free—quite free. Oh! I could scarcely believe it. I laughed and I cried until the people in the house thought that I had gone mad. The past few days had been such a horrible nightmare."

"And then you saw Armand again?"

"Yes. They told him that I was free. And he came here to see me. He often comes; he will be here anon."

"But are you not afraid on his account and your own? He is—he must be still—'suspect'; a well-known adherent of the Scarlet Pimpernel he would be safer out of Paris."

"No! oh, no! Armand is in no danger. He, too, has an unconditional certificate of safety."

"An unconditional certificate of safety?" asked Marguerite, whilst a deep frown of grave puzzlement appeared between her brows. "What does that mean?"

"It means that he is free to come and go as he likes; that neither he nor I have anything to fear from Héron and his awful spies. Oh! but for that sad and careworn look on Armand's face we could be so happy; but he is so unlike himself. He is Armand and yet another; his look at times quite frightens me."

"Yet you know why he is so sad," said Marguerite in a strange, toneless voice which she seemed quite unable to control, for that tonelessness came from a terrible sense of suffocation, of a feeling as if her heart-strings were being gripped by huge, hard hands.

"Yes, I know," said Jeanne half hesitatingly, as if knowing, she was still unconvinced.

"His chief, his comrade, the friend of whom you speak, the Scarlet Pimpernel, who risked his life in order to save yours, Mademoiselle, is a prisoner in the hands of those that hate him."

Marguerite had spoken with sudden vehemence. There was almost an appeal in her voice now, as if she were trying not to convince Jeanne only, but also herself, of something that was quite simple, quite straightforward, and yet which appeared to be receding from her, an intangible something, a spirit that was gradually yielding to a force as yet unborn, to a phantom that had not yet emerged from out chaos.

But Jeanne seemed unconscious of all this. Her mind was absorbed in Armand, the man whom she loved in her simple, whole-hearted way, and who had seemed so different of late.

"Oh, yes!" she said with a deep, sad sigh, whilst the ever-ready tears once more gathered in her eyes, "Armand is very unhappy because of him. The Scarlet Pimpernel was his friend; Armand loved and revered him. Did you know," added the girl, turning large, horror-filled eyes on Marguerite, "that they want some information from him about the Dauphin, and to force him to give it they—they——"

"Yes, I know," said Marguerite.

"Can you wonder, then, that Armand is unhappy? Oh! last night after he went from me, I cried for hours, just because he had looked so sad. He no longer talks of happy England, of the cottage we were to have, and of the Kentish orchards in May. He has not ceased to love me, for at times his love seems so great that I tremble with a delicious sense of fear. But oh! his love for me no longer makes him happy."

Her head had gradually sunk lower and lower on her breast, her voice died down in a murmur broken by heartrending sighs. Every generous impulse in Marguerite's noble nature prompted her to take that sorrowing child in her arms, to comfort her if she could, to reassure her if she had the power. But a strange, icy feeling had gradually invaded her heart, even whilst she listened to the simple unsophisticated talk of Jeanne Lange. Her hands felt numb and clammy, and instinctively she withdrew away from the near vicinity of the girl. She felt as if the room, the furniture in it, even the window before her were dancing a wild and curious dance, and that from everywhere around strange whistling sounds reached her ears, which caused her head to whirl and her brain to reel.

Jeanne had buried her head in her hands. She was crying—softly, almost humbly at first, as if half ashamed of her grief; then, suddenly it seemed, as if she could not contain herself any longer, a heavy sob escaped her throat and shook her whole delicate frame with its violence. Sorrow no longer would be gainsaid, it insisted on physical expression—that awful tearing of the heart-strings which leaves the body numb and panting with pain.

In a moment Marguerite had forgotten; the dark and shapeless phantom that had knocked at the gate of her soul was relegated back into chaos. It ceased to be, it was made to shrivel and to burn in the great seething cauldron of womanly sympathy. What part this child had played in the vast cataclysm of misery which had dragged a noble-hearted enthusiast into the dark torture-chamber, whence the only outlet led to the guillotine, she—Marguerite Blakeney—did not know; what part Armand, her brother, had played in it, that she would not dare to guess; all that she knew was that here was a loving heart that was filled with pain—a young, inexperienced soul that was having its first tussle with the grim realities of life—and every motherly instinct in Marguerite was aroused.

She rose and gently drew the young girl up from her knees, and then closer to her; she pillowed the grief-stricken head against her shoulder, and murmured gentle, comforting words into the tiny ear.

"I have news for Armand," she whispered, "that will comfort him, a message—a letter from his friend. You will see, dear, that when Armand reads it he will become a changed man; you see, Armand acted a little foolishly a few days ago. His chief had given him orders which he disregarded—he was so anxious about you—he should have obeyed, and now, mayhap, he feels that his disobedience may have been the—the innocent cause of much misery to others; that is, no doubt, the reason why he is so sad. The letter from his friend will cheer him, you will see."

"Do you really think so, Madame?" murmured Jeanne, in whose tear-stained eyes the indomitable hopefulness of youth was already striving to shine.

"I am sure of it," assented Marguerite.

And for the moment she was absolutely sincere. The phantom had entirely vanished. She would even, had he dared to reappear, have mocked and derided him for his futile attempt at turning the sorrow in her heart to a veritable hell of bitterness.

33

LITTLE MOTHER

The two women, both so young still, but each of them with a mark of sorrow already indelibly graven in her heart, were clinging to one another, bound together by the strong bond of sympathy. And but for the sadness of it all it were difficult to conjure up a more beautiful picture than that which they presented as they stood side by side; Marguerite, tall and stately as an exquisite lily, with the crown of her ardent hair and the glory of her deep blue eyes, and Jeanne Lange, dainty and delicate, with the brown curls and the childlike droop of the soft, moist lips.

Thus Armand saw them when, a moment or two later, he entered unannounced. He had pushed open the door, and looked on the two women silently for a second or two; on the girl whom he loved so dearly, for whose sake he had committed the great, the unpardonable sin which would send him for ever henceforth, Cain-like, a wanderer on the face of the earth; and the other, his sister, her whom a Judas act would condemn to lonely sorrow and widowhood.

He could have cried out in an agony of remorse, and it was the groan of acute soul anguish which escaped his lips that drew Marguerite's attention to his presence.

Even though many things that Jeanne Lange had said had prepared her for a change in her brother, she was immeasurably shocked by his appearance. He had always been slim and rather below the average in height, but now his usually upright and trim figure seemed to have shrunken within itself; his clothes hung baggy on his shoulders, his hands appeared waxen and emaciated, but the greatest change was in his face, in the wide circles round the eyes that spoke of wakeful nights, in the hollow cheeks, and the mouth that had wholly forgotten how to smile.

Percy after a week's misery immured in a dark and miserable prison, deprived of food and rest, did not look such a physical wreck as did Armand St. Just, who was free.

Marguerite's heart reproached her for what she felt had been neglect, callousness on her part. Mutely, within herself, she craved his forgiveness for the appearance of that phantom which should never have come forth from out the chaotic hell which had engendered it.

"Armand!" she cried.

And the loving arms that had guided his baby footsteps long ago, the tender hands that had wiped his boyish tears, were stretched out with unalterable love toward him.

"I have a message for you, dear," she said gently—"a letter from him. Mademoiselle Jeanne allowed me to wait here for you until you came."

Silently, like a little shy mouse, Jeanne had slipped out of the room. Her pure love for Armand had ennobled every one of her thoughts, and her innate kindliness and refinement had already suggested that brother and sister would wish to be alone. At the door she had turned and met Armand's look. That look had satisfied her; she felt that in it she had read the expression of his love, and to it she had responded with a glance that spoke of hope for a future meeting.

As soon as the door had closed on Jeanne Lange, Armand, with an impulse that refused to be checked, threw himself into his sister's arms. The present, with all its sorrows, its remorse and its shame, had sunk away; only the past remained—the unforgettable past, when Marguerite was "little mother"—the soother, the comforter, the healer, the ever-willing receptacle wherein he had been wont to pour the burden of his childish griefs, of his boyish escapades.

Conscious that she could not know everything—not yet, at any rate—he gave himself over to the rapture of this pure embrace, the last time, mayhap, that those fond arms would close round him in unmixed tenderness, the last time that those fond lips would murmur words of affection and of comfort.

To-morrow those same lips would, perhaps, curse the traitor, and the small hand be raised in wrath, pointing an avenging finger on the Judas.

"Little mother," he whispered, babbling like a child, "it is good to see you again."

"And I have brought you a message from Percy," she said, "a letter which he begged me to give you as soon as maybe."

"You have seen him?" he asked.

She nodded silently, unable to speak. Not now, not when her nerves were strung to breaking pitch, would she trust herself to speak of that awful yesterday. She groped in the folds of her gown and took the packet which Percy had given her for Armand. It felt quite bulky in her hand.

"There is quite a good deal there for you to read, dear," she said. "Percy begged me to give you this, and then to let you read it when you were alone."

She pressed the packet into his hand. Armand's face was ashen pale. He clung to her with strange, nervous tenacity; the paper which he held in one hand seemed to sear his fingers as with a branding-iron.

"I will slip away now," she said, for strangely enough since Percy's message had been in Armand's hands she was once again conscious of that awful feeling of iciness round her heart, a sense of numbness that paralysed her very thoughts.

"You will make my excuses to Mademoiselle Lange," she said, trying to smile. "When you have read, you will wish to see her alone."

Gently she disengaged herself from Armand's grasp and made for the door. He appeared dazed, staring down at that paper which was scorching his fingers. Only when her hand was on the latch did he seem to realize that she was going.

"Little mother," came involuntarily to his lips.

She came straight back to him and took both his wrists in her small hands. She was taller than he, and his head was slightly bent forward. Thus she towered over him, loving but strong, her great, earnest eyes searching his soul.

"When shall I see you again, little mother?" he asked.

"Read your letter, dear," she replied, "and when you have read it, if you care to impart its contents to me, come to-night to my lodgings Quai de la Ferraille, above the saddler's shop. But if there is aught in it that you do not wish me to know, then do not come; I shall understand. Good-bye, dear."

She took his head between her two cold hands, and as it was still bowed she placed a tender kiss, as of a long farewell, upon his hair.

Then she went out of the room.

34

THE LETTER

ARMAND sat in the arm-chair in front of the fire. His head rested against one hand; in the other he held the letter written by the friend whom he had betrayed.

Twice he had read it now, and already was every word of that minute, clear writing graven upon the innermost fibres of his body, upon the most secret cells of his brain.

Armand, I know. I knew even before Chauvelin came to tell me, and stood there hoping to gloat over the soul-agony of a man who finds that he has been betrayed by his dearest friend. But that d——d reprobate did not get that satisfaction, for I was prepared. Not only do I know, Armand, but I *understand.* I, who do not know what love is, have realized how small a thing is honour, loyalty, or friendship when weighed in the balance of a loved one's need.

To save Jeanne you sold me to Héron and his crowd. We are men, Armand, and the word "Forgiveness" has only been spoken once these past two thousand years, and then it was spoken by Divine lips. But Marguerite loves you, and mayhap soon you will be all that is left her to love on this earth. Because of this she must never know . . . As for you, Armand—well, God help you! But meseems that the hell which you are enduring now is ten thousand times worse than mine. I have heard your furtive footsteps in the corridor outside the grated window of this cell, and would not then have exchanged my hell for yours. Therefore, Armand, and because Marguerite loves you, I would wish to turn to you in the hour that I need help. I am in a tight corner, but the hour may come when a comrade's hand might mean life to me. I have thought of you, Armand: partly because having taken more than my life, your own belongs to me, and partly because the plan which I have in my mind will carry with it grave risks for the man who stands by me.

I swore once that never would I risk a comrade's life to save mine own; but matters are so different now . . . we are both in hell, Armand, and I in striving to get out of mine will be showing you a way out of yours.

Will you retake possession of your lodgings in the Rue de la Croix Blanche? I should always know then when to find you on an emergency. But if at any time you receive another letter from me, be its contents what they may, act in accordance with the letter, and send a copy of it at once to Ffoulkes or to Marguerite. Keep in close touch with them both. Tell her I so far forgave your disobedience (there was nothing more) that I may yet trust my life and mine honour in your hands.

I shall have no means of ascertaining definitely whether you will do all that I ask; but somehow, Armand, I know that you will.

For the third time Armand read the letter through.

"But, Armand," he repeated, murmuring the words softly under his breath, "I know that you will."

Prompted by some indefinable instinct, moved by a force that compelled, he allowed himself to glide from the chair on to the floor, on to his knees.

All the pent-up bitterness, the humiliation, the shame of the past few days, surged up from his heart to his lips in one great cry of pain.

"My God!" he whispered, "give me the chance of giving my life for him."

Alone and unwatched, he gave himself over for a few brief moments to the almost voluptuous delight of giving free rein to his grief. The hot Latin blood in him, tempestuous in all its passions, was firing his heart and brain now with the glow of devotion and of self-sacrifice.

The calm, self-centred Anglo-Saxon temperament—the almost fatalistic acceptance of failure without reproach yet without despair, which Percy's letter to him had evidenced in so marked a manner—was, mayhap, somewhat beyond the comprehension of this young enthusiast, with pure Gallic blood in his veins, who was ever wont to allow his most elemental passions to sway his actions. But though he did not altogether understand, Armand St. Just could fully appreciate. All that was noble and loyal in him rose triumphant from beneath the devastating ashes of his own shame.

Soon his mood calmed down, his look grew less wan and haggard. Hearing Jeanne's discreet and mouselike steps in the next room, he rose quickly and hid the letter in the pocket of his coat.

She came in and inquired anxiously about Marguerite; a hurriedly expressed excuse from him, however, satisfied her easily enough. She wanted to be alone with Armand, happy to see that he held his head more erect to-day, and that the look as of a hunted creature had entirely gone from his eyes.

She ascribed this happy change to Marguerite, finding it in her heart to be grateful to the sister for having accomplished what the *fiancée* had failed to do.

For awhile they remained together, sitting side by side, speaking at times, but mostly silent, seeming to savour the return of truant happiness. Armand felt like a sick man who had obtained a sudden surcease from pain. He looked round him with a kind of melancholy delight on this room which he had entered for the first time less than a fortnight ago, and which already was so full of memories.

Those first hours spent at the feet of Jeanne Lange, how exquisite they had been, how fleeting in the perfection of their happiness! Now they seemed to belong to a far distant past, evanescent like the perfume of violets, swift in their flight like the winged steps of youth. Blakeney's letter had effectually taken the bitter sting from out his remorse, but it had increased his already over-heavy load of inconsolable sorrow.

Later in the day he turned his footsteps in the direction of the river, to the house in the Quai de la Ferraille above the saddler's shop. Marguerite had returned alone from the expedition to the Rue de Charonne. Whilst Sir Andrew took charge of the little party of fugitives and escorted them out of Paris, she came back to her lodgings in order to collect her belongings, preparatory to taking up her quarters in the house of Lucas, the old-clothes dealer. She returned also because she hoped to see Armand.

"If you care to impart the contents of the letter to me, come to my lodgings to-night," she had said.

All day a phantom had haunted her, the phantom of an agonizing suspicion.

But now the phantom had vanished never to return. Armand was sitting close beside her, and he told her that the chief had selected him amongst all the others to stand by him inside the walls of Paris until the last.

"I shall mayhap," thus closed that precious document, "have no means of ascertaining definitely whether you will act in accordance with this letter. But somehow, Armand, I know that you will."

"I know that you will, Armand," reiterated Marguerite fervently.

She had only been too eager to be convinced; the dread and dark suspicion which had been like a hideous poisoned sting had only vaguely touched her soul; it had not gone in very deeply. How could it, when in its death-dealing passage it encountered the rampart of tender, motherly love?

Armand, trying to read his sister's thoughts in the depths of her blue eyes, found the look in them limpid and clear. Percy's message to Armand had reassured her just as he had intended that it should do. Fate had dealt over harshly with her as it was, and Blakeney's remorse for the sorrow which he had already caused her, was scarcely less keen than Armand's. He did not wish her to bear the intolerable burden of hatred against her brother; and by binding St. Just close to him at the supreme hour of danger he hoped to prove to the woman whom he loved so passionately that Armand was worthy of trust.

PART III

35

THE LAST PHASE

"Well? How is it now?"

"The last phase, I think."

"He will yield?"

"He must."

"Bah! you have said it yourself often enough; those English are tough."

"It takes time to hack them to pieces, perhaps. In this case even you, citizen Chauvelin, said that it would take time. Well, it has taken just seventeen days, and now the end is in sight."

It was close on midnight in the guard-room, which gave on the innermost cell of the Conciergerie. Héron had just visited the prisoner as was his wont at this hour of the night. He had watched the changing of the guard, inspected the night-watch, questioned the sergeant in charge, and finally he had been on the point of retiring to his own new quarters in the house of Justice, in the near vicinity of the Conciergerie, when citizen Chauvelin entered the guard-room unexpectedly and detained his colleague with the peremptory question:

"How is it now?"

"If you are so near the end, citizen Héron," he now said, sinking his voice to a whisper, "why not make a final effort and end it to-night?"

"I wish I could; the anxiety is wearing me out more than him," he added with a jerky movement of the head in the direction of the inner cell.

"Shall I try?" rejoined Chauvelin grimly.

"Yes, an you wish."

Citizen Héron's long limbs were sprawling on a guard-room chair. In this low, narrow room he looked like some giant whose body had been carelessly and loosely put together by a 'prentice hand in the art of manufacture. His broad shoulders were bent, probably under the weight of anxiety to which he had referred, and his head, with the lank, shaggy hair overshadowing the brow, was sunk deep down on his chest.

Chauvelin looked on his friend and associate with no small measure of contempt. He would no doubt have vastly preferred to conclude the present difficult transaction entirely in his own way and alone; but equally there was no doubt that the Committee of Public Safety did not trust him quite so fully as it used to do before the fiasco at Calais and the blunders at Boulogne. Héron, on the other hand, enjoyed to its outermost the confidence of his colleagues; his ferocious cruelty and his callousness were well known, whilst physically, owing to his great height, and bulky if loosely-knit frame, he had a decided advantage over his trim and slender friend.

As far as the bringing of prisoners to trial was concerned the chief agent of the Committee of General Security had been given a perfectly free hand by the decree of the 27th Nivôse. At first, therefore, he had experienced no difficulty when he desired to keep the Englishman in close confinement for a time without hurrying on that summary trial and condemnation which the populace had loudly demanded, and to which they felt that they were entitled to as a public holiday. The death of the Scarlet Pimpernel on the guillotine had been a spectacle promised by every demagogue who desired to purchase a few votes by holding out visions of pleasant doings to come; and during the first few days the mob of Paris was content to enjoy the delights of expectation.

But now seventeen days had gone by and still the Englishman was not being brought to trial. The pleasure-loving public was waxing impatient and earlier this evening, when citizen Héron had shown himself in the stalls of the National Theatre, he was greeted by a crowded audience with decided expressions of disapproval and open mutterings of:

"What of the Scarlet Pimpernel?"

It almost looked as if he would have to bring that accursed Englishman to the guillotine without having wrested from him the secret which he would have given a fortune to possess. Chauvelin, who had also been present at the theatre, had heard the expressions of discontent; hence his visit to his colleague at this late hour of the night.

"Shall I try?" he had queried with some impatience, and a deep sigh of satisfaction escaped his thin lips when the chief agent, wearied and discouraged, had reluctantly agreed.

"Let the men make as much noise as they like," he added with an enigmatical smile. "The Englishman and I will want an accompaniment to our pleasant conversation."

Héron growled a surly assent, and without another word Chauvelin turned towards the inner cell. As he stepped in he allowed the iron bar to fall into its socket behind him. Then he went farther into the room until the distant recess was fully revealed to him.

His tread had been furtive and almost noiseless. Now he paused, for he had caught sight of the prisoner. For a moment he stood quite still, with his hands clasped behind his back in his wonted attitude—quite still save for a strange, involuntary twitching of his mouth, and the nervous clasping and interlocking of his fingers behind his back. He was savouring to its utmost fulsomeness the supremest joy which animal man can ever know—the joy of looking on a fallen enemy.

Blakeney sat at the table with one arm resting on it, the emaciated hand tightly clutched, the body leaning forward, the eyes looking into nothingness.

For the moment he was unconscious of Chauvelin's presence, and the latter could gaze on him to the full content of his heart.

Indeed, to all outward appearances there sat a man whom privations of every sort and kind, the want of fresh air, of proper food, above all, of rest, had worn down physically to a shadow. There was not a particle of colour in cheeks or lips, the skin was grey in hue, the eyes looked like deep caverns, wherein the glow of fever was all that was left of life.

Chauvelin looked on in silence, vaguely stirred by something that he could not define, something that right through his triumphant satisfaction, his hatred and final certainty of revenge, had roused in him a sense almost of admiration.

He gazed on the motionless figure of the man who had endured so much for an ideal, and as he gazed it seemed to him as if the spirit no longer dwelt in the body, but hovered round in the dank, stuffy air of the narrow cell above the head of the lonely prisoner, crowning it with glory that was no longer of this earth.

Of this the looker-on was conscious despite himself, of that and of the fact that stare as he might, and with perception rendered doubly keen by hate, he could not, in spite of all, find the least trace of mental weakness in that far-seeing gaze which seemed to pierce the prison walls, nor could he see that bodily weakness had tended to subdue the ruling passions.

Sir Percy Blakeney—a prisoner since seventeen days in close, solitary confinement, half-starved, deprived of rest, and of that mental and physical activity which had been the very essence of life to him hitherto—might be outwardly but a shadow of his former brilliant self, but nevertheless he was still that same elegant English gentleman, that prince of dandies whom Chauvelin had first met eighteen months ago at the most courtly Court in Europe. His clothes, despite constant wear and want of attention from a scrupulous valet, still betrayed the perfection of London tailoring; he had put them on with meticulous care, they were free from the slightest particle of dust, and the filmy folds of priceless Mechlin still half-veiled the delicate whiteness of his shapely hands.

And in the pale, haggard face, in the whole pose of body and arm, there was still the expression of that indomitable strength of will, that reckless daring, that almost insolent challenge of Fate; it was there, untamed, uncrushed. Chauvelin himself could not deny to himself its presence or its force. He felt that behind that smooth brow, which looked waxlike now, the mind was still alert, scheming, plotting, striving for freedom, for conquest and for power, and rendered doubly keen and virile by the ardour of supreme self-sacrifice.

Chauvelin now made a slight movement, and suddenly Blakeney became conscious of his presence, and swift as a flash a smile lit up his wan face.

"Why! if it is not my engaging friend Monsieur Chambertin," he said gaily.

He rose and stepped forward in the most approved fashion prescribed by the elaborate etiquette of the time. But Chauvelin smiled grimly and a look of almost animal lust gleamed in his pale eyes, for he had noted that as he rose Sir Percy had to seek support of the table, even whilst a dull film appeared to gather over his eyes.

The gesture had been quick and cleverly disguised, but it had been there nevertheless—that and the livid hue that overspread the face as if consciousness was threatening to go. All of which was sufficient still further to assure the looker-on that that mighty physical strength was giving way at last, that strength which he had hated in his enemy almost as much as he had hated the thinly veiled insolence of his manner.

"And what procures me, sir, the honour of your visit?" continued Blakeney, who had—at any rate, outwardly soon recovered himself, and whose voice, though distinctly hoarse and spent, rang quite cheerfully across the dank narrow cell.

"My desire for your welfare, Sir Percy," replied Chauvelin with equal pleasantry.

"La, sir; but have you not gratified that desire already, to an extent which leaves no room for further solicitude? But I pray you, will you not sit down?" he continued, turning back towards the table. "I was about to partake of the lavish supper which your friends have provided for me. Will you not share it, sir? You are most royally welcome, and it will mayhap remind you of that supper we shared together in Calais, eh? when you, Monsieur Chambertin, were temporarily in holy orders."

He laughed, offering his enemy a chair, and pointed with inviting gesture to the hunk of brown bread and the mug of water which stood on the table.

"Such as it is, sir," he said with a pleasant smile, "it is yours to command."

Chauvelin sat down. He held his lower lip tightly between his teeth, so tightly that a few drops of blood appeared upon its narrow surface. He was making vigorous efforts to keep his temper under control, for he would not give his enemy the satisfaction of seeing him resent his insolence. He could afford to keep calm now that victory was at last in sight, now that he knew that he had but to raise a finger, and those smiling, impudent lips would be closed for ever at last.

"Sir Percy," he resumed quietly, "no doubt it affords you a certain amount of pleasure to aim your sarcastic shafts at me. I will not begrudge you that pleasure: in your present position, sir, your shafts have little or no sting."

"And I shall have but few chances left to aim them at your charming self," interposed Blakeney, who had drawn another chair close to the table and was now sitting opposite his enemy, with the light of the lamp falling full on his own face, as if he wished his enemy to know that he had nothing to hide, no thought, no hope, no fear.

"Exactly," said Chauvelin dryly. "That being the case, Sir Percy, what say you to no longer wasting the few chances which are left to you for safety? The time is getting on. You are not, I imagine, quite as hopeful as you were even a week ago . . . you have never been over-comfortable in this cell, why not end this unpleasant state of affairs now—once and for all? You'll not have cause to regret it. My word on it."

Sir Percy leaned back in his chair. He yawned loudly and ostentatiously.

"I pray you, sir, forgive me," he said. "Never have I been so d——d fatigued. I have not slept for more than a fortnight."

"Exactly, Sir Percy. A night's rest would do you a world of good."

"A night, sir?" exclaimed Blakeney with what seemed like an echo of his former inimitable laugh. "La! I should want a week."

"I am afraid we could not arrange for that, but one night would greatly refresh you."

"You are right, sir, you are right; but those d——d fellows in the next room make so much noise."

"I would give strict orders that perfect quietude reigned in the guard-room this night," said Chauvelin, murmuring softly, and there was a gentle purr in his voice, "and that you were left undisturbed for several hours. I would give orders that a comforting supper be served to you at once, and that everything be done to minister to your wants."

"That sounds d——d alluring, sir. Why did you not suggest this before?"

"You were so—what shall I say—so obstinate, Sir Percy?"

"Call it pig-headed, my dear Monsieur Chambertin," retorted Blakeney gaily, "truly you would oblige me."

"In any case you, sir, were acting in direct opposition to your own interests."

"Therefore you came," concluded Blakeney airily, "like the good Samaritan to take compassion on me and my troubles, and to lead me straight away to comfort, a good supper and a downy bed."

"Admirably put, Sir Percy," said Chauvelin blandly; "that is exactly my mission."

"How will you set to work, Monsieur Chambertin?"

"Quite easily, if you, Sir Percy, will yield to the persuasion of my friend citizen Héron."

"Ah!"

"Why, yes! He is anxious to know where little Capet is. A reasonable whim, you will own, considering that the disappearance of the child is causing him grave anxiety."

"And you, Monsieur Chambertin?" queried Sir Percy with that suspicion of insolence in his manner which had the power to irritate his enemy even now. "And yourself, sir; what are your wishes in the matter?"

"Mine, Sir Percy?" retorted Chauvelin. "Mine? Why, to tell you the truth, the fate of little Capet interests me but little. Let him rot in Austria or in our prisons, I care not which. He'll never trouble France overmuch, I imagine. The teachings of old Simon will not tend to make a leader or a king out of the puny brat whom you chose to drag out of our keeping. My wishes, sir, are the annihilation of your accursed League, and the lasting disgrace, if not the death, of its chief."

He had spoken more hotly than he had intended, but all the pent-up rage of the past eighteen months, the recollections of Calais and Boulogne, had all surged up again in his mind, because despite the closeness of these prison walls, despite the grim shadow of starvation and of death that beckoned so close at hand, he still encountered a pair of mocking eyes, fixed with relentless insolence upon him.

Whilst he spoke Blakeney had once more leaned forward, resting his elbows upon the table. Now he drew nearer to him the wooden platter on which reposed that very uninviting piece of dry bread. With solemn intentness he proceeded to break the bread into pieces; then he offered the platter to Chauvelin.

"I am sorry," he said pleasantly, "that I cannot spare you more dainty fare, sir, but this is all that your kind friends have supplied me with to-day."

He crumbled some of the dry bread in his slender fingers then started munching the crumbs with apparent relish. He poured out some water into the mug and drank it. Then he said with a light laugh:

"Even the vinegar which that ruffian Brogard served us at Calais was preferable to this, do you not imagine so, my good Monsieur Chambertin?"

Chauvelin made no reply. Like a feline creature on the prowl, he was watching the prey that has so nearly succumbed to his talons. Blakeney's face now was positively ghastly. The effort to speak, to laugh, to appear unconcerned, was apparently beyond his strength. His cheeks and lips were livid in hue, the skin clung like a thin layer of wax to the bones of cheek and jaw, and the heavy lids that fell over the eyes had purple patches on them like lead.

To a system in such an advanced state of exhaustion the stale water and dusty bread must have been terribly nauseating, and Chauvelin himself, callous and thirsting for vengeance though he was, could hardly bear to look calmly on the martyrdom of this man whom he and his colleagues were torturing in order to gain their own ends.

An ashen hue, which seemed like the shadow of the hand of death, passed over the prisoner's face. Chauvelin felt compelled to avert his gaze. A feeling that was almost akin to remorse had stirred a hidden cord in his heart. The feeling did not last—the heart had been too long atrophied by the constantly recurring spectacles of cruelties, massacres, and wholesale hecatombs perpetrated in the past eighteen months in the name of liberty and fraternity to be capable of a sustained effort in the direction of gentleness or of pity. Any noble instinct in these revolutionaries had long ago been drowned in a whirlpool of exploits that would for ever sully the records of humanity; and this keeping of a fellow-creature on the rack in order to wring from him a Judas-like betrayal was but a complement to a record of infamy that had ceased by its very magnitude to weigh upon their souls.

Chauvelin was in no way different from his colleagues; the crimes in which he bore no hand he had condoned by continuing to serve the Government that had committed them, and his ferocity in the present case was increased a thousandfold by his personal hatred for the man who had so often fooled and baffled him.

When he looked round a second or two later that ephemeral fit of remorse did its final vanishing; he had once more encountered the pleasant smile, the laughing if ashen-pale face of his unconquered foe.

"Only a passing giddiness, my dear sir," said Sir Percy lightly. "As you were saying——"

At the airily-spoken words, at the smile that accompanied them, Chauvelin had jumped to his feet. There was something almost supernatural, weird, and impish about the present situation, about this dying man who, like an impudent schoolboy, seemed to be mocking Death with his tongue in his cheek, about his laugh that appeared to find its echo in a widely-yawning grave.

"In the name of God, Sir Percy," he said roughly, as he brought his clenched fist crashing down upon the table, "this situation is intolerable. Bring it to an end to-night!"

"Why, sir?" retorted Blakeney, "methought you and your kind did not believe in God."

"No. But you English do."

"We do. But we do not care to hear His name on your lips."

"Then in the name of the wife whom you love——"

But even before the words had died upon his lips, Sir Percy, too, had risen to his feet.

"Have done, man—have done," he broke in hoarsely, and despite weakness, despite exhaustion and weariness, there was such a dangerous look in his hollow eyes as he leaned across the table that Chauvelin drew back a step or two, and—vaguely fearful—looked furtively towards the opening into the guard-room. "Have done," he reiterated for the third time; "do not name her, or by the living God whom you dared invoke I'll find strength yet to smite you in the face."

But Chauvelin, after that first moment of almost superstitious fear, had quickly recovered his *sang-froid.*

"Little Capet, Sir Percy," he said, meeting the other's threatening glance with an imperturbable smile, "tell me where to find him, and you may yet live to savour the caresses of the most beautiful woman in England."

He had meant it as a taunt, the final turn of the thumbscrew applied to a dying man, and he had in that watchful, keen mind of his well weighed the full consequences of the taunt.

The next moment he had paid to the full the anticipated price. Sir Percy had picked up the pewter mug from the table—it was half filled with brackish water—and with a hand that trembled but slightly he hurled it straight at his opponent's face.

The heavy mug did not hit citizen Chauvelin; it went crashing against the stone wall opposite. But the water was trickling from the top of his head, all down his eyes and cheeks. He shrugged his shoulders with a look of benign indulgence directed at his enemy, who had fallen back in his chair, exhausted with the effort.

Then he took out his handkerchief and calmly wiped the water from his face.

"Not quite so straight a shot as you used to be, Sir Percy," he said mockingly.

"No, sir—apparently—not."

The words came out in gasps. He was like a man only partly conscious. The lips were parted, the eyes closed, the head leaning against the high back of the chair. For the space of one second Chauvelin feared that his zeal had outrun his prudence, that he had dealt a death-blow to a man in the last stage of exhaustion, where he had only wished to fan the flickering flame of life. Hastily—for the seconds seemed precious—he ran to the opening that led into the guard-room.

"Brandy—quick!" he cried.

Héron looked up, roused from the state of semi-somnolence in which he had lain for the past half-hour. He disentangled his long limbs from out the guard-room chair.

"Eh?" he queried. "What is it?"

"Brandy," reiterated Chauvelin impatiently; "the prisoner has fainted."

"Bah!" retorted the other with a callous shrug of the shoulders, "you are not going to revive him with brandy, I imagine."

"No. But you will, citizen Héron," rejoined the other drily, "for if you do not he'll be dead in an hour!"

"Devils in hell!" exclaimed Héron, "you have not killed him? You—you d——d fool!"

He was wide awake enough now; wide awake and shaking with fury. Almost foaming at the mouth and uttering volleys of the choicest oaths, he elbowed his way roughly through the groups of soldiers who were crowding round the centre table of the guard-room, smoking and throwing dice or playing cards. They made way for him as hurriedly as they could, for it was not safe to thwart the citizen agent when he was in a rage.

Héron walked across to the opening and lifted the iron bar. With scant ceremony he pushed his colleague aside and strode into the cell, whilst Chauvelin, seemingly not resenting the other's ruffianly manners and violent language, followed closely upon his heel.

In the centre of the room both men paused, and Héron turned with a surly growl to his friend.

"You vowed he would be dead in an hour," he said reproachfully.

The other shrugged his shoulders.

"It does not look like it now certainly," he said drily.

Blakeney was sitting—as was his wont—close to the table, with one arm leaning on it, the other, tightly clenched, resting upon his knee. A ghost of a smile hovered round his lips.

"Not in an hour, citizen Héron," he said, and his voice now was scarce above a whisper, "nor yet in two."

"You are a fool, man," said Héron roughly. "You have had seventeen days of this. Are you not sick of it?"

"Heartily, my dear friend," replied Blakeney a little more firmly.

"Seventeen days," reiterated the other, nodding his shaggy head; "you came here on the 2nd of Pluviôse, to-day is the 19th."

"The 19th Pluviôse?" interposed Sir Percy, and a strange gleam suddenly flashed in his eyes. "Demn it, sir, and in Christian parlance what may that day be?"

"The 7th of February at your service, Sir Percy," replied Chauvelin quietly.

"I thank you, sir. In this d——d hole I had lost count of time."

Chauvelin, unlike his rough and blundering colleague, had been watching the prisoner very closely for the last moment or two, conscious of a subtle, undefinable change that had come over the man during those few seconds while he, Chauvelin, had thought him dying. The pose was certainly the old familiar one, the head erect, the hand clenched, the eyes looking through and beyond the stone walls; but there was an air of listlessness in the stoop of the shoulders, and—except for that one brief gleam just now—a look of more complete weariness round the hollow eyes! To the keen watcher it appeared as if that sense of living power, of unconquered will and defiant mind was no longer there, and as if he himself need no longer fear that almost supersensual thrill which had a while ago kindled in him a vague sense of admiration—almost of remorse.

Even as he gazed, Blakeney slowly turned his eyes full upon him. Chauvelin's heart gave a triumphant bound.

With a mocking smile he met the wearied look, the pitiable appeal. His turn had come at last—his turn to mock and to exult. He knew that what he was watching now was no longer the last phase of a long and noble martyrdom; it was the end—the inevitable end—that for which he had schemed and striven, for which he had schooled his heart to ferocity and callousness that were devilish in their intensity. It was the end indeed, the slow descent of a soul from the giddy heights of attempted self-sacrifice, where it had striven to soar for a time, until the body and the will both succumbed together and dragged it down with them into the abyss of submission and of irreparable shame.

36

SUBMISSION

Silence reigned in the narrow cell for a few moments, whilst two human jackals stood motionless over their captured prey.

A savage triumph gleamed in Chauvelin's eyes, and even Héron, dull and brutal though he was, had become vaguely conscious of the great change that had come over the prisoner.

Blakeney, with a gesture and a sigh of hopeless exhaustion had once more rested both his elbows on the table; his head fell heavy and almost lifeless downward in his arms.

"Curse you, man!" cried Héron almost involuntarily. "Why in the name of hell did you wait so long?"

Then, as the prisoner made no reply, but only raised his head slightly, and looked on the other two men with dulled, wearied eyes, Chauvelin interposed calmly:

"More than a fortnight has been wasted in useless obstinacy, Sir Percy. Fortunately it is not too late."

"Capet?" said Héron hoarsely, "tell us, where is Capet?"

He leaned across the table, his eyes were bloodshot with the keenness of his excitement, his voice shook with the passionate desire for the crowning triumph.

"If you'll not worry me," murmured the prisoner; and the whisper came so laboriously and so low that both men were forced to bend their ears close to the scarcely moving lips; "if you will let me sleep and rest, and leave me in peace——"

"The peace of the grave, man," retorted Chauvelin roughly; "if you will only speak. Where is Capet?"

"I cannot tell you; the way is long, the road—intricate."

"Bah!"

"I'll lead you to him, if you will give me rest."

"We don't want you to lead us anywhere," growled Héron with a smothered curse; "tell us where Capet is; we'll find him right enough."

"I cannot explain; the way is intricate; the place off the beaten track, unknown except to me and my friends."

Once more that shadow, which was so like the passing of the hand of Death, overspread the prisoner's face; his head rolled back against the chair.

"He'll die before he can speak," muttered Chauvelin under his breath. "You usually are well provided with brandy, citizen Héron."

The latter no longer demurred. He saw the danger as clearly as did his colleague. It had been hell's own luck if the prisoner were to die now when he seemed ready to give in. He produced a flask from the pocket of his coat, and this he held to Blakeney's lips.

"Beastly stuff," murmured the latter feebly. "I think I'd sooner faint—than drink."

"Capet? where is Capet?" reiterated Héron impatiently.

"One—two—three hundred leagues from here. I must let one of my friends know; he'll communicate with the others; they must be prepared," replied the prisoner slowly.

Héron uttered a blasphemous oath.

"Where is Capet? Tell us where Capet is, or——"

He was like a raging tiger that had thought to hold its prey and suddenly realized that it was being snatched from him. He raised his fist, and without doubt the next moment he would have silenced for ever the lips that held the precious secret, but Chauvelin fortunately was quick enough to seize his wrist.

"Have a care, citizen," he said peremptorily; "have a care! You called me a fool just now when you thought I had killed the prisoner. It is his secret we want first; his death can follow afterwards."

"Yes, but not in this d——d hole," murmured Blakeney.

"On the guillotine if you'll speak," cried Héron, whose exasperation was getting the better of his self-interest, "but if you'll not speak then it shall be starvation in this hole—yes, starvation," he growled, showing a row of large and uneven teeth like those of some mongrel cur, "for I'll have that door walled in to-night, and not another living soul shall cross this threshold again until your flesh has rotted on your bones and the rats have had their fill of you."

The prisoner raised his head slowly, a shiver shook him as if caused by ague, and his eyes, that appeared almost sightless, now looked with a strange glance of horror on his enemy.

"I'll die in the open," he whispered, "not in this d——d hole."

"Then tell us where Capet is."

"I cannot; I wish to God I could. But I'll take you to him, I swear I will. I'll make my friends give him up to you. Do you think that I would not tell you now, if I could."

Héron, whose every instinct of tyranny revolted against this thwarting of his will, would have continued to heckle the prisoner even now, had not Chauvelin suddenly interposed with an authoritative gesture.

"You'll gain nothing this way, citizen," he said quietly; "the man's mind is wandering; he is probably quite unable to give you clear directions at this moment."

"What am I to do, then?" muttered the other roughly. "He cannot live another twenty-four hours now, and would only grow more and more helpless as time went on."

"Unless you relax your strict régime with him."

"And if I do we'll only prolong this situation indefinitely; and in the meanwhile how do we know that the brat is not being spirited away out of the country?"

The prisoner, with his head once more buried in his arms, had fallen into a kind of torpor, the only kind of sleep that the exhausted system would allow. With a brutal gesture Héron shook him by the shoulder.

"Hé," he shouted, "none of that, you know. We have not settled the matter of young Capet yet."

Then, as the prisoner made no movement, and the chief agent indulged in one of his favourite volleys of oaths, Chauvelin placed a peremptory hand on his colleague's shoulder.

"I tell you, citizen, that this is no use," he said firmly. "Unless you are prepared to give up all thoughts of finding Capet, you must try and curb your temper, and try diplomacy where force is sure to fail."

"Diplomacy?" retorted the other with a sneer. "Bah! it served you well at Boulogne last autumn, did it not, citizen Chauvelin?"

"It has served me better now," rejoined the other imperturbably. "You will own, citizen, that it is my diplomacy which has placed within your reach the ultimate hope of finding Capet."

"H'm!" muttered the other, "you advised us to starve the prisoner. Are we any nearer to knowing his secret?"

"Yes. By a fortnight of weariness, of exhaustion and of starvation, you are nearer to it by the weakness of the man whom in his full strength you could never hope to conquer."

"But if the cursed Englishman won't speak, and in the meanwhile dies on my hands——"

"He won't do that if you will accede to his wish. Give him some good food now, and let him sleep till dawn."

"And at dawn he'll defy me again. I believe now that he has some scheme in his mind, and means to play us a trick."

"That, I imagine, is more than likely," retorted Chauvelin drily; "though," he added with a contemptuous nod of the head directed at the huddled-up figure of his once brilliant enemy, "neither mind nor body seem to me to be in a sufficiently active state just now for hatching plot or intrigue; but even if—vaguely floating through his clouded mind, there has sprung some little scheme for evasion, I give you my word, citizen Héron, that you can thwart him completely, and gain all that you desire, if you will only follow my advice."

There had always been a great amount of persuasive power in citizen Chauvelin, ex-envoy of the revolutionary Government of France at the Court of St. James, and that same persuasive eloquence did not fail now in its effect on the chief agent of the Committee of General Security. The latter was made of coarser stuff than his more brilliant colleague. Chauvelin was like a wily and sleek panther that is furtive in its movements, that will lure its prey, watch it, follow it with stealthy footsteps, and only pounce on it when it is least wary, whilst Héron was more like a raging bull that tosses its head in a blind, irresponsible fashion, rushes at an obstacle without gauging its resisting powers, and allows its victim to slip from beneath its weight through the very clumsiness and brutality of its assault.

Still Chauvelin had two heavy black marks against him—those of his failures at Calais and Boulogne. Héron, rendered cautious both by the deadly danger in which he stood and the sense of his own incompetence to deal with the present situation, tried to resist the other's authority as well as his persuasion.

"Your advice was not of great use to citizen Collot last autumn at Boulogne," he said, and spat on the ground by way of expressing both his independence and his contempt.

"Still, citizen Héron," retorted Chauvelin with unruffled patience, "it is the best advice that you are likely to get in the present emergency. You have eyes to see, have you not? Look on your prisoner at this moment. Unless something is done, and at once, too, he will be past negotiating with in the next twenty-four hours; then what will follow?"

He put his thin hand once more on his colleague's grubby coat-sleeve, he drew him closer to himself away from the vicinity of that huddled figure, that captive lion, wrapped in a torpid somnolence that looked already so like the last long sleep.

"What will follow, citizen Héron?" he reiterated, sinking his voice to a whisper; "sooner or later some meddlesome busybody who sits in the Assembly of the Convention will get wind that little Capet is no longer in the Temple Prison, that a pauper child was substituted for him, and that you, citizen Héron, together with the commissaries in charge, have thus been fooling the nation and its representatives for over a fortnight. What will follow then, think you?"

And he made an expressive gesture with his outstretched fingers across his throat.

Héron found no other answer but blasphemy.

"I'll make that cursed Englishman speak yet," he said with a fierce oath.

"You cannot," retorted Chauvelin decisively. "In his present state he is incapable of doing it, even if he would, which also is doubtful."

"Ah! then you do think that he still means to cheat us?"

"Yes, I do. But I also know that he is no longer in a physical state to do it. No doubt he thinks that he is. A man of that type is sure to overvalue his own strength; but look at him, citizen Héron. Surely you must see that we have nothing to fear from him now."

Héron now was like a voracious creature that has two victims lying ready for his gluttonous jaws. He was loath to let either of them go. He hated the very thought of seeing the Englishman being led out of this narrow cell, where he had kept a watchful eye over him night and day for a fortnight, satisfied that with every day, every hour, the chances of escape became more improbable and more rare; at the same time there was the possibility of the recapture of little Capet, a possibility which made Héron's brain reel with the delightful vista of it, and which might never come about if the prisoner remained silent to the end.

"I wish I were quite sure," he said sullenly, "that you were body and soul in accord with me."

"I am in accord with you, citizen Héron," rejoined the other earnestly—"body and soul in accord with you. Do you not believe that I hate this man—aye! hate him with a hatred ten thousand times more strong than yours? I want his death—Heaven or hell alone know how I long for that—but what I long for most is his lasting disgrace. For that I have worked, citizen Héron—for that I advised and helped you. When first you captured this man you wanted summarily to try him, to send him to the guillotine amidst the joy of the populace of Paris, and crowned with a splendid halo of martyrdom. That man, citizen Héron, would have baffled you, mocked you, and fooled you even on the steps of the scaffold. In the zenith of his strength and of his insurmountable good luck you and all your myrmidons and all the assembled guard of Paris would have had no power over him. The day that you led him out of this cell in order to take him to trial or to the guillotine would have been that of your hopeless discomfiture. Having once walked out of this cell hale, hearty and alert, be the escort round him ever so strong, he never would have re-entered it again. Of that I am as convinced as that I am alive. I know the man; you don't.

Mine are not the only fingers through which he has slipped. Ask citizen Collot d'Herbois, ask Sergeant Bibot at the barrier of Ménilmontant, ask General Santerre and his guards. They all have a tale to tell. Did I believe in God or the devil, I should also believe that this man has supernatural powers and a host of demons at his beck and call."

"Yet you talk now of letting him walk out of this cell to-morrow?"

"He is a different man now, citizen Héron. On my advice you placed him on a régime that has counteracted the supernatural power by simple physical exhaustion, and driven to the four winds the host of demons who no doubt fled in the face of starvation."

"If only I thought that the recapture of Capet was as vital to you as it is to me," said Héron, still unconvinced.

"The capture of Capet is just as vital to me as it is to you," rejoined Chauvelin earnestly, "if it is brought about through the instrumentality of the Englishman."

He paused, looking intently on his colleague, whose shifty eyes encountered his own. Thus eye to eye the two men at last understood one another.

"Ah!" said Héron with a snort, "I think I understand."

"I am sure that you do," responded Chauvelin drily. "The disgrace of this cursed Scarlet Pimpernel and his league is as vital to me, and more, as the capture of Capet is to you. That is why I showed you the way how to bring that meddlesome adventurer to his knees; that is why I will help you now both to find Capet with his aid and to wreak what reprisals you like on him in the end."

Héron before he spoke again cast one more look on the prisoner. The latter had not stirred; his face was hidden, but the hands, emaciated, nerveless, and waxen, like those of the dead, told a more eloquent tale, mayhap, than the eyes could do. The chief agent of the Committee of General Security walked deliberately round the table until he stood once more close beside the man from whom he longed with passionate ardour to wrest an all-important secret. With brutal, grimy hand he raised the head that lay sunken and inert, against the table; with callous eyes he gazed attentively on the face that was then revealed to him; he looked on the waxen flesh, the hollow eyes, the bloodless lips; then he shrugged his wide shoulders, and with a laugh that surely must have caused joy in hell, he allowed the wearied head to fall back against the outstretched arms, and turned once again to his colleague.

"I think you are right, citizen Chauvelin," he said; "there is not much supernatural power here. Let me hear your advice."

37

CHAUVELIN'S ADVICE

Citizen Chauvelin had drawn his colleague with him to the end of the cell that was farthest away from the recess, and the table at which the prisoner was sitting.

Here the noise and hubbub that went on constantly in the guard-room would effectually drown a whispered conversation. Chauvelin called to the sergeant to hand him a couple of chairs over the barrier. These he placed against the wall opposite the opening, and beckoning Héron to sit down, he did likewise, placing himself close to his colleague.

From where the two men now sat they could see both into the guard-room opposite them and into the recess at the furthermost end of the cell.

"First of all," began Chauvelin after a while, and sinking his voice to a whisper, "let me understand you thoroughly, citizen Héron. Do you want the death of the Englishman, either to-day or to-morrow, either in this prison or on the guillotine? For that now is easy of accomplishment; or do you want, above all, to get hold of little Capet?"

"It is Capet I want," growled Héron savagely under his breath. "Capet! Capet! My own neck is dependent on my finding Capet. Curse you, have I not told you that clearly enough?"

"You have told it me very clearly, citizen Héron; but I wished to make assurance doubly sure, and also make you understand that I, too, want the Englishman to betray little Capet into your hands. I want that more even than I do his death."

"Then in the name of hell, citizen, give me your advice."

"My advice to you, citizen Héron, is this. Give your prisoner just now a sufficiency of food to revive him—he will have had a few moments' sleep—and when he has eaten, and, mayhap drunk a glass of wine, he will, no doubt, feel a recrudescence of strength; then give him pen and ink and paper. He must, as he says, write to one of his followers, who, in his turn, I suppose, will communicate with the others, bidding them to be prepared to deliver up little Capet to us; the letter must make it clear to that crowd of English gentlemen that their beloved chief is giving up the uncrowned King of France to us in exchange for his own safety. But I think you will agree with me, citizen Héron, that it would not be over-prudent on our part to allow that same gallant crowd to be forewarned too soon of the proposed doings of their chief. Therefore, I think, we'll explain to the prisoner that his follower, whom he will first apprise of his intentions, shall start with us to-morrow on our expedition, and accompany us until its last stage, when, if it is found necessary, he may be sent on ahead, strongly escorted of course, and with personal messages from the gallant Scarlet Pimpernel to the members of his League."

"What will be the good of that?" broke in Héron viciously. "Do you want one of his accursed followers to be ready to give him a helping hand on the way if he tries to slip through our fingers?"

"Patience, patience, my good Héron!" rejoined Chauvelin with a placid smile. "Hear me out to the end. Time is precious. You shall offer what criticism you will when I have finished, but not before."

"Go on, then. I listen."

"I am not only proposing that one member of the Scarlet Pimpernel League shall accompany us to-morrow," continued Chauvelin, "but I would also force the prisoner's wife—Marguerite Blakeney—to follow in our train."

"A woman? Bah! What for?"

"I will tell you the reason of this presently. In her case I should not let the prisoner know beforehand that she too will form part of our expedition. Let this come as a pleasing surprise for him. She could join us on our way out of Paris."

"How will you get hold of her?"

"Easily enough. I know where to find her. I traced her myself a few days ago to a house in the Rue de Charonne, and she is not likely to have gone away from Paris while her husband was at the Conciergerie. But this is a digression, let me proceed more consecutively. The letter, as I have said, being written to-night by the prisoner to one of his followers, I will myself see that it is delivered into the right hands. You, citizen Héron, will in the meanwhile make all arrangements for the journey. We ought to start at dawn, and we ought to be prepared, especially during the first fifty leagues of the way, against organized attack in case the Englishman leads us into an ambush."

"Yes. He might even do that, curse him!" muttered Héron.

"He might, but it is unlikely. Still it is best to be prepared. Take a strong escort, citizen, say twenty or thirty men, picked and trained soldiers who would make short work of civilians, however well-armed they might be. There are twenty members—including the chief—in that Scarlet Pimpernel League, and I do not quite see how from this cell the prisoner could organize an ambuscade against us at a given time. Anyhow, that is a matter for you to decide. I have still to place before you a scheme which is a measure of safety for ourselves and our men against ambush as well as against trickery, and which I feel sure you will pronounce quite adequate."

"Let me hear it, then?"

"The prisoner will have to travel by coach, of course. You can travel with him, if you like, and put him in irons, and thus avert all chances of his escaping on the road. But"—and here Chauvelin made a long pause, which had the effect of holding his colleague's attention still more closely—"remember that we shall have his wife and one of his friends with us. Before we finally leave Paris to-morrow we will explain to the prisoner that at the first attempt at escape on his part, at the slightest suspicion that he has tricked us for his own ends or is leading us into an ambush—at the slightest suspicion, I say—you, citizen Héron, will order his friend first, and then Marguerite Blakeney herself, to be summarily shot before his eyes."

Héron gave a long, low whistle. Instinctively he threw a furtive, backward glance at the prisoner, then he raised his shifty eyes to his colleague.

There was unbounded admiration expressed in them. One blackguard had met another—a greater one than himself—and was proud to acknowledge him as his master.

"By Lucifer, citizen Chauvelin," he said at last, "I should never have thought of such a thing myself."

Chauvelin put up his hand with a gesture of self-deprecation.

"I certainly think that measure ought to be adequate," he said with a gentle air of assumed modesty, "unless you would prefer to arrest the woman and lodge her here, keeping her here as an hostage."

"No, no!" said Héron with a gruff laugh; "that idea does not appeal to me nearly so much as the other. I should not feel so secure on the way. . . . I should always be thinking that that cursed woman had been allowed to escape. . . . No! no! I would rather keep her under my own eye—just as you suggest, citizen Chauvelin . . . and under the prisoner's, too," he added with a coarse jest. "If he did not actually see her, he might be more ready to try and save himself at her expense. But, of course, he could not see her shot before his eyes. It is a perfect plan, citizen, and does you infinite credit; and if the Englishman tricked us," he concluded with a fierce and savage oath, "and we did not find Capet at the end of the journey, I would gladly strangle his wife and his friend with my own hands."

"A satisfaction which I would not begrudge you, citizen," said Chauvelin drily. "Perhaps you are right . . . the woman had best be kept under your own eye . . . the prisoner will never risk her safety, on that I would stake my life. We'll deliver our final 'either—or' the moment that she has joined our party, and before we start further on our way. Now, citizen Héron, you have heard my advice; are you prepared to follow it?"

"To the last letter," replied the other.

And their two hands met in a grasp of mutual understanding—two hands already indelibly stained with much innocent blood, more deeply stained now with seventeen past days of inhumanity and miserable treachery to come.

38

CAPITULATION

What occurred within the inner cell of the Conciergerie prison within the next half-hour of that 19th day of Pluviôse in the year II. of the Republic is, perhaps, too well known to history to need or bear overfull repetition.

Chroniclers, intimate with the inner history of those infamous days, have told us how the chief agent of the Committee of General Security gave orders one hour after midnight that hot soup, white bread and wine be served to the prisoner, who for close on fourteen days previously had been kept on short rations of black bread and water; the sergeant in charge of the guard-room watch for the night also received strict orders that that same prisoner was on no account to be disturbed until the hour of six in the morning, when he was to be served with anything in the way of breakfast that he might fancy.

All this we know, and also that citizen Héron, having given all necessary orders for the morning's expedition, returned to the Conciergerie, and found his colleague Chauvelin waiting for him in the guard-room.

"Well?" he asked with febrile impatience—"the prisoner?"

"He seems better and stronger," replied Chauvelin.

"Not too well, I hope."

"No, no, only just well enough."

"You have seen him—since his supper?"

"Only from the doorway. It seems he ate and drank hardly at all, and the sergeant had some difficulty in keeping him awake until you came."

"Well, now for the letter," concluded Héron with the same marked feverishness of manner which sat so curiously on his uncouth personality. "Pen, ink and paper, sergeant!" he commanded.

"On the table, in the prisoner's cell, citizen," replied the sergeant.

He proceeded the two citizens across the guard-room to the doorway, and raised for them the iron bar, lowering it back after them.

The next moment Héron and Chauvelin were once more face to face with their prisoner.

Whether by accident or design the lamp had been so placed that as the two men approached its light fell full upon their faces, while that of the prisoner remained in shadow. He was leaning forward with both elbows on the table, his thin, tapering fingers toying with the pen and ink-horn which had been placed close to his hand.

"I trust that everything has been arranged for your comfort, Sir Percy?" Chauvelin asked with a sarcastic little smile.

"I thank you, sir," replied Blakeney politely.

"You feel refreshed, I hope?"

"Greatly so, I assure you. But I am still demmed sleepy; and if you would kindly be brief——"

"You have not changed your mind, sir?" queried Chauvelin, and a note of anxiety, which he vainly tried to conceal, quivered in his voice.

"No, my good M. Chambertin," replied Blakeney with the same urbane courtesy, "I have not changed my mind."

A sigh of relief escaped the lips of both the men. The prisoner certainly had spoken in a clearer and firmer voice; but whatever renewed strength wine and food had imparted to him he apparently did not mean to employ in renewed obstinacy. Chauvelin, after a moment's pause, resumed more calmly:

"You are prepared to direct us to the place where little Capet lies hidden?"

"I am prepared to do anything, sir, to get out of this d——d hole."

"Very well. My colleague, citizen Héron, has arranged for an escort of twenty men picked from the best regiment of the Garde de Paris to accompany us—yourself, him and me—to wherever you will direct us. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly, sir."

"You must not imagine for a moment that we, on the other hand, guarantee to give you your life and freedom even if this expedition prove unsuccessful."

"I would not venture on suggesting such a wild proposition, sir," said Blakeney placidly.

Chauvelin looked keenly on him. There was something in the tone of that voice that he did not altogether like—something that reminded him of an evening at Calais, and yet again of a day at Boulogne. He could not read the expression in the eyes, so with a quick gesture he pulled the lamp forward so that its light now fell full on the face of the prisoner.

"Ah! that is certainly better, is it not, my dear M. Chambertin?" said Sir Percy, beaming on his adversary with a pleasant smile.

His face, though still of the same ashen hue, looked serene if hopelessly wearied; the eyes seemed to mock, but this Chauvelin decided in himself must have been a trick of his own overwrought fancy. After a brief moment's pause he resumed drily:

"If, however, the expedition turns out successful in every way—if little Capet, without much trouble to our escort, falls safe and sound into our hands—if certain contingencies which I am about to tell you all fall out as we wish—then, Sir Percy, I see no reason why the Government of this country should not exercise its prerogative of mercy towards you after all."

"An exercise, my dear M. Chambertin, which must have wearied through frequent repetition," retorted Blakeney with the same imperturbable smile.

"The contingency at present is somewhat remote; when the time comes we'll talk this matter over. . . . I will make no promise . . . and, anyhow, we can discuss it later."

"At present we are but wasting our valuable time over so trifling a matter. . . . If you'll excuse me, sir . . . I am so demmed fatigued——"

"Then you will be glad to have everything settled quickly, I am sure."

"Exactly, sir."

Héron was taking no part in the present conversation. He knew that his temper was not likely to remain within bounds, and though he had nothing but contempt for his colleague's courtly manners, yet vaguely in his stupid, blundering way he grudgingly admitted that mayhap it was better to allow citizen Chauvelin to deal with the Englishman. There was always the danger that if his own violent temper got the better of him, he might even at this eleventh hour order this insolent prisoner to summary trial and the guillotine, and thus lose the final chance of the more important capture.

He was sprawling on a chair in his usual slouching manner, with his big head sunk between his broad shoulders, his shifty, prominent eyes wandering restlessly from the face of his colleague to that of the other man.

But now he gave a grunt of impatience.

"We are wasting time, citizen Chauvelin," he muttered. "I have still a great deal to see to if we are to start at dawn. Get the d——d letter written, and——"

The rest of the phrase was lost in an indistinct and surly murmur. Chauvelin, after a shrug of the shoulders, paid no further heed to him; he turned, bland and urbane, once more to the prisoner.

"I see with pleasure, Sir Percy," he said, "that we thoroughly understand one another. Having had a few hours' rest you will, I know, feel quite ready for the expedition. Will you kindly indicate to me the direction in which we will have to travel?"

"Northwards all the way."

"Towards the coast?"

"The place to which we must go is about seven leagues from the sea."

"Our first objective then will be Beauvais, Amiens, Abbeville, Crécy, and so on?"

"Precisely."

"As far as the forest of Boulogne, shall we say?"

"Where we shall come off the beaten track, and you will have to trust to my guidance."

"We might go there now, Sir Percy, and leave you here."

"You might. But you would not then find the child. Seven leagues is not far from the coast. He might slip through your fingers."

"And my colleague Héron, being disappointed, would inevitably send you to the guillotine."

"Quite so," rejoined the prisoner placidly. "Methought, sir, that we had decided that I should lead this little expedition? Surely," he added, "it is not so much the Dauphin whom you want as my share in this betrayal."

"You are right as usual, Sir Percy. Therefore let us take that as settled. We go as far as Crécy, and thence place ourselves entirely in your hands."

"The journey should not take more than three days, sir."

"During which you will travel in a coach in the company of my friend Héron."

"I could have chosen pleasanter company, sir; still, it will serve."

"This being settled, Sir Percy, I understand that you desire to communicate with one of your followers."

"Some one must let the others know . . . those who have the Dauphin in their charge."

"Quite so. Therefore I pray you write to one of your friends that you have decided to deliver the Dauphin into our hands in exchange for your own safety."

"You said just now that this you would not guarantee?" interposed Blakeney quietly.

"If all turns out well," retorted Chauvelin with a show of contempt, "and if you will write the exact letter which I shall dictate, we might even give you that guarantee."

"The quality of your mercy, sir, passes belief."

"Then I pray you write. Which of your followers will have the honour of the communication?"

"My brother-in-law, Armand St. Just; he is still in Paris, I believe. He can let the others know."

Chauvelin made no immediate reply. He paused awhile, hesitating. Would Sir Percy Blakeney be ready—if his own safety demanded it—to sacrifice the man who had betrayed him? In the momentous "either—or!" that was to be put to him, by and by, would he choose his own life and leave Armand St. Just to perish? It was not for Chauvelin—or any man of his stamp—to judge of what Blakeney would do under such circumstances, and had it been a question of St. Just alone, mayhap Chauvelin would have hesitated still more at the present juncture.

But the friend as hostage was only destined to be a minor leverage for the final breaking-up of the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel through the disgrace of its chief. There was the wife—Marguerite Blakeney—sister of St. Just, joint and far more important hostage, whose very close affection for her brother might prove an additional trump card in that handful which Chauvelin already held.

Blakeney paid no heed seemingly to the other's hesitation. He did not even look up at him, but quietly drew pen and paper towards him, and made ready to write.

"What do you wish me to say?" he asked simply.

"Will that young blackguard answer your purpose, citizen Chauvelin?" queried Héron roughly.

Obviously the same doubt had crossed his mind. Chauvelin quickly reassured him.

"Better than anyone else," he said firmly. "Will you write in French and at my dictation, Sir Percy?"

"I am waiting to do so, my dear sir."

"Begin your letter as you wish, then; now continue."

And he began to dictate slowly—in French—and watching every word as it left Blakeney's pen.

" 'I cannot stand my present position any longer. Citizen Héron, and also M. Chauvelin——' Yes, Sir Percy, Chauvelin, not Chambertin . . . C, H, A, U,-V, E, L, I, N. . . . That is quite right—'have made this prison a perfect hell for me.' "

Sir Percy looked up from his writing, smiling.

"You wrong yourself, my dear M. Chambertin!" he said; "I have really been most comfortable."

"I wish to place the matter before your friends in as indulgent a manner as I can," retorted Chauvelin drily.

"I thank you, sir. Pray proceed."

". . . 'a perfect hell for me,' " resumed the other. "Have you that? . . . 'and I have been forced to give way. To-morrow we start from here at dawn; and I will guide citizen Héron to the place where he can find the Dauphin. But the authorities demand that one of my followers, one who has once been a member of the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel, shall accompany me on this expedition. I therefore ask you'—or 'desire you' or 'beg you'—whichever you prefer, Sir Percy . . ."

" 'Ask you' will do quite nicely. This is really very interesting, you know."

". . . 'to be prepared to join the expedition. We start at dawn, and you would be required to be at the main gate of the house of Justice at six o'clock precisely. I have an assurance from the authorities that your life shall be inviolate, but if you refuse to accompany me the guillotine will await me on the morrow.' "

" 'The guillotine will await me on the morrow.' That sounds quite cheerful, does it not M. Chambertin," said the prisoner, who had not evinced the slightest surprise at the wording of the letter whilst he wrote at the other's dictation. "Do you know, I quite enjoyed writing this letter; it so reminded me of happy days in Boulogne."

Chauvelin pressed his lips together. Truly now he felt that a retort from him would have been undignified, more especially as just at this moment there came from the guard-room the sound of men's voices talking and laughing, the occasional clang of steel, or of a heavy boot against the tiled floor, the rattling of dice, or a sudden burst of laughter—sounds, in fact, that betokened the presence of a number of soldiers close by.

Chauvelin contented himself with a nod in the direction of the guard-room.

"The conditions are somewhat different now," he said placidly, "from those that reigned in Boulogne. But will you not sign your letter, Sir Percy?"

"With pleasure, sir," responded Blakeney, as with an elaborate flourish of the pen he appended his name to the missive.

Chauvelin was watching him with eyes that would have shamed a lynx by their keenness. He took up the completed letter, read it through very carefully, as if to find some hidden meaning behind the very words which he himself had dictated; he studied the signature, and looked vainly for a mark or sign that might convey a different sense to that which he had intended. Finally, finding none, he folded the letter up with his own hand, and at once slipped it in the pocket of his coat.

"Take care, M. Chambertin," said Blakeney lightly; "it will burn a hole in that elegant vest of yours."

"It will have no time to do that, Sir Percy," retorted Chauvelin blandly; "and if you will furnish me with citizen St. Just's present address I will myself convey the letter to him at once."

"At this hour of the night? Poor old Armand, he'll be abed. But his address, sir, is No. 32 Rue de la Croix Blanche, on the first floor, the door on your right as you mount the stairs; you know the room well, citizen Chauvelin; you have been in it before. And now," he added with a loud and ostentatious yawn, "shall we all to bed? We start at dawn, you said, and I am so d——d fatigued."

Frankly, he did not look it now. Chauvelin himself, despite his matured plans, despite all the precautions that he meant to take for the success of this gigantic scheme, felt a sudden strange sense of fear creeping into his bones. Half an hour ago he had seen a man in what looked like the last stage of utter physical exhaustion, a hunched-up figure, listless and limp, hands that twitched nervously, the face as of a dying man. Now those outward symptoms were still there certainly; the face by the light of the lamp still looked livid, the lips bloodless, the hands emaciated and waxen; but the eyes!—they were still hollow with heavy lids still purple, but in their depths there was a curious, mysterious light, a look that seemed to see something that was hidden to natural sight.

Citizen Chauvelin thought that Héron, too, must be conscious of this, but the Committee's agent was sprawling on a chair, sucking a short-stemmed pipe, and gazing with entire animal satisfaction on the prisoner.

"The most perfect piece of work we have ever accomplished, you and I, citizen Chauvelin," he said complacently.

"You think that everything is quite satisfactory?" asked the other, with anxious stress on his words.

"Everything, of course. Now, you see to the letter. I will give final orders for to-morrow, but I shall sleep in the guard-room."

"And I on that inviting bed," interposed the prisoner lightly, as he rose to his feet. "Your servant, citizens!"

He bowed his head slightly, and stood by the table whilst the two men prepared to go. Chauvelin took a final long look at the man whom he firmly believed he had at last brought down to abject disgrace.

Blakeney was standing erect, watching the two retreating figures—one slender hand was on the table. Chauvelin saw that it was leaning rather heavily, as if for support, and that even whilst a final mocking laugh sped him and his colleague on their way, the tall figure of the conquered lion swayed like a stalwart oak that is forced to bend to the mighty fury of an all-compelling wind.

With a sigh of content Chauvelin took his colleague by the arm, and together the two men walked out of the cell.

39

KILL HIM!

Two hours after midnight Armand St. Just was wakened from sleep by a peremptory pull at his bell. In these days in Paris but one meaning could, as a rule, be attached to such a summons at this hour of the night, and Armand, though possessed of an unconditional certificate of safety, sat up in bed, quite convinced that for some reason which would presently be explained to him he had once more been placed on the list of the "suspect," and that his trial and condemnation on a trumped-up charge would follow in due course.

Truth to tell, he felt no fear at the prospect, and only a very little sorrow. The sorrow was not for himself; he regretted neither life nor happiness. Life had become hateful to him since happiness had fled with it on the dark wings of dishonour; sorrow such as he felt was only for Jeanne! She was very young, and would weep bitter tears. She would be unhappy, because she truly loved him, and because this would be the first cup of bitterness which life was holding out to her. But she was very young, and sorrow would not be eternal. It was better so. He, Armand St. Just, though he loved her with an intensity of passion that had been magnified and strengthened by his own overwhelming shame, had never really brought his beloved one single moment of unalloyed happiness.

From the very first day when he sat beside her in the tiny boudoir of the Square du Roule, and the heavy footfall of Héron and his bloodhounds broke in on their first kiss, down to this hour, which he believed struck his own death-knell, his love for her had brought more tears to her dear eyes than smiles to her exquisite mouth.

Her he had loved so dearly that for her sweet sake he had sacrificed honour, friendship and truth; to free her, as he believed, from the hands of impious brutes he had done a deed that cried Cain-like for vengeance to the very throne of God. For her he had sinned, and because of that sin, even before it was committed, their love had been blighted and happiness had never been theirs.

Now it was all over. He would pass out of her life, up the steps of the scaffold, tasting as he mounted them the most entire happiness that he had known since that awful day when he became a Judas.

The peremptory summons, once more repeated, roused him from his meditations. He lit a candle, and without troubling to slip any of his clothes on, he crossed the narrow antechamber and opened the door that gave on the landing.

"In the name of the people!"

He had expected to hear not only those words, but also the grounding of arms and the brief command to halt. He had expected to see before him the white facings of the uniform of the Garde de Paris, and to feel himself roughly pushed back into his room preparatory to the search being made of all his effects and the placing of irons on his wrists.

Instead of this, it was a quiet, dry voice that said without undue harshness:

"In the name of the people!"

And instead of the uniforms, the bayonets and the scarlet caps with tricolour cockades, he was confronted by a slight, sable-clad figure, whose face, lit by the flickering light of the tallow candle, looked strangely pale and earnest.

"Citizen Chauvelin!" gasped Armand, more surprised than frightened at this unexpected apparition.

"Himself, citizen, at your service," replied Chauvelin, with his quiet, ironical manner "I am the bearer of a letter for you from Sir Percy Blakeney. Have I your permission to enter?"

Mechanically Armand stood aside allowing the other man to pass in. He closed the door behind his nocturnal visitor, then, taper in hand, he preceded him into the inner room.

It was the same one in which a fortnight ago a fighting lion had been brought to his knees. Now it lay wrapped in gloom, the feeble light of the candle only lighting Armand's face and the white frill of his shirt. The young man put the taper down on the table and turned to his visitor.

"Shall I light the lamp?" he asked.

"Quite unnecessary," replied Chauvelin curtly. "I have only a letter to deliver, and after that to ask you one brief question."

From the pocket of his coat he drew the letter which Blakeney had written an hour ago.

"The prisoner wrote this in my presence," he said as he handed the letter over to Armand. "Will you read it?"

Armand took it from him, and sat down close to the table; leaning forward, he held the paper near the light, and began to read. He read the letter through very slowly to the end, then once again from the beginning. He was trying to do that which Chauvelin had wished to do an hour ago; he was trying to find the inner meaning which he felt must inevitably lie behind these words, which Percy had written with his own hand.

That these bare words were but a blind to deceive the enemy Armand never doubted for a moment. In this he was as loyal as Marguerite would have been herself. Never for a moment did the suspicion cross his mind that Blakeney was about to play the part of a coward, but he, Armand, felt that as a faithful friend and follower he ought by instinct to know exactly what his chief intended, what he meant him to do.

Swiftly his thoughts flew back to that other letter, the one which Marguerite had given him—the letter full of pity and of friendship, which had brought him hope and a joy and peace which he had thought at one time that he would never know again. And suddenly one sentence in that letter stood out so clearly before his eyes that it blurred the actual, tangible ones on the paper which even now rustled in his hand.

"But if at any time you receive another letter from me—be its contents what they may—act in accordance with the letter, and send a copy of it at once to Ffoulkes or to Marguerite."

Now everything seemed at once quite clear; his duty, his next actions, every word that he would speak to Chauvelin. Those that Percy had written to him were already indelibly graven on his memory.

Chauvelin had waited with his usual patience, silent and imperturbable, while the young man read. Now, when he saw that Armand had finished, he said quietly:

"Just one question, citizen, and I need not detain you longer. But, first, will you kindly give me back that letter? It is a precious document which will for ever remain in the archives of the nation."

But even while he spoke Armand, with one of those quick intuitions that come in moments of acute crisis, had done just that which he felt Blakeney would wish him to do. He had held the letter close to the candle. A corner of the thin crisp paper immediately caught fire, and before Chauvelin could utter a word of anger or make a movement to prevent the conflagration the flames had licked up fully one half of the letter, and Armand had only just time to throw the remainder on the floor and to stamp out the blaze with his foot.

"I am sorry, citizen," he said calmly; "an accident."

"A useless act of devotion," interposed Chauvelin, who already had smothered the oath that had risen to his lips. "The Scarlet Pimpernel's actions in the present matter will not lose their merited publicity through the foolish destruction of this document."

"I had no thought, citizen," retorted the young man, "of commenting on the actions of my chief, or of trying to deny them that publicity which you seem to desire for them almost as much as I do."

"More, citizen, a great deal more! The impeccable Scarlet Pimpernel, the noble and gallant English gentleman, has agreed to deliver into our hands the uncrowned King of France—in exchange for his own life and freedom. Methinks that even his worst enemy would not wish for a better ending to a career of adventure and a reputation for bravery unequalled in Europe. But no more of this, time is pressing, I must help citizen Héron with his final preparations for his journey. You, of course, citizen St. Just, will act in accordance with Sir Percy Blakeney's wishes?"

"Of course," replied Armand.

"You will present yourself at the main entrance of the house of Justice at six o'clock this morning."

"I will not fail you."

"A coach will be provided for you. You will follow the expedition as hostage for the good faith of your chief."

"I quite understand."

"H'm! That's brave! You have no fear, citizen St. Just?"

"Fear of what, sir?"

"You will be a hostage in our hands, citizen; your life a guarantee that your chief has no thought of playing us false. Now I was thinking of—of certain events—which led to the arrest of Sir Percy Blakeney."

"Of my treachery, you mean," rejoined the young man calmly, even though his face had suddenly become pale as death. "Of the damnable lie wherewith you cheated me into selling my honour and made me what I am—a creature scarce fit to walk upon this earth."

"Oh!" protested Chauvelin blandly.

"The damnable lie," continued Armand more vehemently, "that hath made me one with Cain and the Iscariot. When you goaded me into the hellish act, Jeanne Lange was already free."

"Free—but not safe."

"A lie, man! A lie! for which you are thrice accursed. Great God, is it not you that should have cause for fear? Methinks were I to strangle you now I should suffer less of remorse."

"And would be rendering your ex-chief but a sorry service," interposed Chauvelin with quiet irony. "Sir Percy Blakeney is a dying man, citizen St. Just; he'll be a dead man at dawn if I do not put in an appearance by six o'clock this morning. This is a private understanding between citizen Héron and myself. We agreed to it before I came to see you."

"Oh, you take care of your own miserable skin well enough! But you need not be afraid of me—I take my orders from my chief, and he has not ordered me to kill you."

"That was kind of him. Then we may count on you? You are not afraid?"

"Afraid that the Scarlet Pimpernel would leave me in the lurch because of the immeasurable wrong I have done to him?" retorted Armand, proud and defiant in the name of his chief. "No, sir, I am not afraid of that; I have spent the last fortnight in praying to God that my life might yet be given for his."

"H'm! I think it most unlikely that your prayers will be granted, citizen; prayers, I imagine, so very seldom are; but I don't know, I never pray myself. In your case, now, I should say that you have not the slightest chance of the Deity interfering in so pleasant a manner. Even were Sir Percy Blakeney prepared to wreak personal revenge on you, he would scarcely be so foolish as to risk the other life we shall also hold as hostage for his good faith."

"The other life?"

"Yes. Your sister, Lady Blakeney, will also join the expedition to-morrow. This Sir Percy does not yet know; but it will come as a pleasant surprise for him. At the slightest suspicion of false play on Sir Percy's part, at his slightest attempt at escape, your life and that of your sister are forfeit; you will both be summarily shot before his eyes. I do not think that I need be more precise, eh, citizen St. Just?"

The young man was quivering with passion. A terrible loathing for himself, for his crime which had been the precursor of this terrible situation, filled his soul to the verge of sheer physical nausea. A red film gathered before his eyes, and through it he saw the grinning face of the inhuman monster who had planned this hideous, abominable thing. It seemed to him as if in the silence and the hush of the night, above the feeble, flickering flame that threw weird shadows around, a group of devils were surrounding him, and were shouting, "Kill him! Kill him now! Rid the earth of this hellish brute!"

No doubt if Chauvelin had exhibited the slightest sign of fear, if he had moved an inch towards the door, Armand, blind with passion, driven to madness by agonizing remorse more even than by rage, would have sprung at his enemy's throat and crushed the life out of him as he would out of a venomous beast. But the man's calm, his immobility, recalled St. Just to himself. Reason, that had almost yielded to passion again, found strength to drive the enemy back this time, to whisper a warning, an admonition, even a reminder. Enough harm, God knows, had been done by tempestuous passion already. And God alone knew what terrible consequences its triumph now might bring in its trail, and striking on Armand's buzzing ears Chauvelin's words came back as a triumphant and mocking echo:

"He'll be a dead man at dawn if I do not put in an appearance by six o'clock."

The red film lifted, the candle flickered low, the devils vanished, only the pale face of the Terrorist gazed with gentle irony out of the gloom.

"I think that I need not detain you any longer, citizen St. Just," he said quietly; "you can get three or four hours' rest yet before you need make a start, and I still have a great many things to see to. I wish you good night, citizen."

"Good night," murmured Armand mechanically.

He took the candle and escorted his visitor back to the door. He waited on the landing, taper in hand, while Chauvelin descended the narrow-winding stairs.

There was a light in the concierge's lodge. No doubt the woman had struck it when the nocturnal visitor had first demanded admittance. His name and tricolour scarf of office had ensured him the full measure of her attention, and now she was evidently sitting up waiting to let him out.

St. Just, satisfied that Chauvelin had finally gone, now turned back to his own rooms.

40

GOD HELP US ALL

He carefully locked the outer door. Then he lit the lamp, for the candle gave but a flickering light, and he had some important work to do.

Firstly, he picked up the charred fragment of the letter and smoothed it out carefully and reverently as he would a relic. Tears had gathered in his eyes, but he was not ashamed of them, for no one saw them; but they eased his heart, and helped to strengthen his resolve. It was a mere fragment that had been spared by the flame, but Armand knew every word of the letter by heart.

He had pen, ink and paper ready to his hand, and from memory wrote out a copy of it. To this he added a covering letter from himself to Marguerite:

This—which I had from Percy through the hands of Chauvelin—I neither question nor understand. . . . He wrote the letter, and I have no thought but to obey. In his previous letter to me he enjoined me, if ever he wrote to me again, to obey him implicitly, and to communicate with you. To both these commands do I submit with a glad heart. But of this must I give you warning, little mother—Chauvelin desires you also to accompany us to-morrow. . . . Percy does not know this yet, else he would never start. But those fiends fear that his readiness is a blind . . . and that he has some plan in his head for his own escape and the continued safety of the Dauphin. . . . This plan they hope to frustrate through holding you and me as hostages for his good faith. God only knows how gladly I would give my life for my chief . . . but your life, dear little mother . . . is sacred above all. . . . I think that I do right in warning you. God help us all.

Having written the letter, he sealed it, together with the copy of Percy's letter which he had made. Then he took up the candle and went downstairs.

There was no longer any light in the concierge's lodge, and Armand had some difficulty in making himself heard. At last the woman came to the door. She was tired and cross after two interruptions of her night's rest, but she had a partiality for her young lodger, whose pleasant ways and easy liberality had been like a pale ray of sunshine through the squalor of every-day misery.

"It is a letter, citoyenne," said Armand, with earnest entreaty. "for my sister. She lives in the Rue de Charonne, near the fortifications, and must have it within an hour; it is a matter of life and death to her, to me, and to another who is very dear to us both."

The concierge threw up her hands in horror.

"Rue de Charonne, near the fortifications," she exclaimed, "and within an hour! By the Holy Virgin, citizen, that is impossible. Who will take it? There is no way."

"A way must be found, citoyenne," said Armand firmly, "and at once; it is not far, and there are five golden louis waiting for the messenger!"

Five golden louis! The poor, hard-working woman's eyes gleamed at the thought. Five louis meant food for at least two months if one was careful, and——

"Give me the letter, citizen," she said, "time to slip on a warm petticoat and a shawl, and I'll go myself. It's not fit for the boy to go at this hour."

"You will bring me back a line from my sister in reply to this," said Armand, whom circumstances had at last rendered cautious. "Bring it up to my room that I may give you the five louis in exchange."

He waited while the woman slipped back into her room. She heard him speaking to her boy; the same lad who a fortnight ago had taken the treacherous letter which had lured Blakeney to the house and into the fatal ambuscade that had been prepared for him. Everything reminded Armand of that awful night, every hour that he had since spent in the house had been racking torture to him. Now at last he was to leave it, and on an errand which might help to ease the load of remorse from his heart.

The woman was soon ready. Armand gave her final directions as to how to find the house; then she took the letter and promised to be very quick, and to bring back a reply from the lady.

Armand accompanied her to the door. The night was dark, a thin drizzle was falling; he stood and watched until the woman's rapidly-walking figure was lost in the misty gloom.

Then with a heavy sigh he once more went within.

41

WHEN HOPE WAS DEAD

In a small upstairs room in the Rue de Charonne, above the shop of Lucas the old-clothes dealer, Marguerite sat with Sir Andrew Ffoulkes. Armand's letter, with its message and its warning, lay open on the table between them, and she had in her hand the sealed packet which Percy had given her just ten days ago, and which she was only to open if all hope seemed to be dead, if nothing appeared to stand any longer between that one dear life and irretrievable shame.

A small lamp placed on the table threw a feeble yellow light on the squalid, ill-furnished room, for it lacked still an hour or so before dawn. Armand's concierge had brought her lodger's letter, and Marguerite had quickly despatched a brief reply to him, a reply that held love and also encouragement.

Then she had summoned Sir Andrew. He never had a thought of leaving her during these days of dire trouble, and he had lodged all this while in a tiny room on the topmost floor of this house in the Rue de Charonne.

At her call he had come down very quickly, and now they sat together at the table, with the oil lamp illuminating their pale, anxious faces; she the wife and he the friend holding a consultation together in this most miserable hour that preceded the cold wintry dawn.

Outside a thin, persistent rain mixed with snow pattered against the small window-panes, and an icy wind found out all the crevices in the worm-eaten woodwork that would afford it ingress to the room. But neither Marguerite nor Ffoulkes was conscious of the cold. They had wrapped their cloaks round their shoulders, and did not feel the chill currents of air that caused the lamp to flicker and to smoke.

"I can see now," said Marguerite in that calm voice which comes so naturally in moments of infinite despair—"I can see now exactly what Percy meant when he made me promise not to open this packet until it seemed to me—to me and to you, Sir Andrew—that he was about to play the part of a coward.

A coward! Great God!" She checked the sob that had risen to her throat, and continued in the same calm manner and quiet, even voice:

"You do think with me, do you not, that the time has come, and that we must open this packet?"

"Without a doubt, Lady Blakeney," replied Ffoulkes with equal earnestness. "I would stake my life that already a fortnight ago Blakeney had that same plan in his mind which he has now matured. Escape from that awful Conciergerie Prison with all the precautions so carefully taken against it was impossible. I knew that alas! from the first. But in the open all might yet be different. I'll not believe it that a man like Blakeney is destined to perish at the hands of those curs."

She looked on her loyal friend with tear-dimmed eyes through which shone boundless gratitude and heart-broken sorrow.

He had spoken of a fortnight! It was ten days since she had seen Percy. It had then seemed as if death had already marked him with its grim sign. Since then she had tried to shut away from her mind the terrible visions which her anguish constantly conjured up before her of his growing weakness, of the gradual impairing of that brilliant intellect, the gradual exhaustion of that mighty physical strength.

"God bless you, Sir Andrew, for your enthusiasm and for your trust," she said with a sad little smile; "but for you I should long ago have lost all courage, and these last ten days—what a cycle of misery they represent—would have been maddening but for your help and your loyalty. God knows I would have courage for everything in life, for everything save one. But just that—his death—that would be beyond my strength—neither reason nor body could stand it. Therefore, I am so afraid, Sir Andrew. . . ." she added piteously.

"Of what, Lady Blakeney?"

"That when he knows that I too am to go as hostage, as Armand says in his letter, that my life is to be guarantee for his, I am afraid that he will draw back . . . that he will . . . Oh, my God!" she cried with sudden fervour, "tell me what to do!"

"Shall we open the packet?" asked Ffoulkes gently, "and then just make up our minds to act exactly as Blakeney has enjoined us to do, neither more nor less, but just word for word, deed for deed, and I believe that that will be right—whatever may betide—in the end."

Once more his quiet strength, his earnestness, and his faith comforted her. She dried her eyes and broke open the seal. There were two separate letters in the packet, one unaddressed, obviously intended for her and Ffoulkes, the other was addressed to M. le baron Jean de Batz, 15 Rue St. Jean de Latran à Paris.

"A letter addressed to that awful Baron de Batz," said Marguerite, looking with puzzled eyes on the paper as she turned it over and over in her hand, "to that bombastic windbag! I know him and his ways well! What can Percy have to say to him?"

Sir Andrew too looked puzzled. But neither of them had the mind to waste time in useless speculations. Marguerite unfolded the letter which was intended for her, and after a final look on her friend, whose kind face was quivering with excitement, she began slowly to read aloud:

I need not ask either of you two to trust me, knowing that you will. But I could not die inside this hole like a rat in a trap—I had to try and free myself, at the worst to die in the open beneath God's sky. You two will understand, and understanding you will trust me to the end. Send the enclosed letter at once to its address. And you, Ffoulkes, my most sincere and most loyal friend, I beg with all my soul to see to the safety of Marguerite. Armand will stay by me—but you, Ffoulkes, do not leave her, stand by her. As soon as you read this letter—and you will not read it until both she and you have felt that hope has fled and I myself am about to throw up the sponge—try and persuade her to make for the coast as quickly as may be. . . . At Calais you can open up communications with the *Day Dream* in the usual way, and embark on her at once. Let no member of the League remain on French soil an hour longer after that. Then tell the skipper to make for Le Portel—the place which he knows—and there to keep a sharp outlook for another three nights. After that make straight for home, for it will be no use waiting any longer. I shall not come. These measures are for Marguerite's safety, and for you all who are in France at this moment. Comrade, I entreat you to look on these measures as on my dying wish. To de Batz I have given rendezvous at the Chapelle of the Holy Sepulchre, just outside the park of the Château d'Ourde. He will help me to save the Dauphin, and if by good luck he also helps me to save myself I shall be within seven leagues of Le Portel, and with the Liane frozen as she is I could reach the coast.

But Marguerite's safety I leave in your hands, Ffoulkes. Would that I could look more clearly into the future, and know that those devils will not drag her into danger. Beg her to start at once for

Calais immediately you have both read this. I only beg, I do not command. I know that you, Ffoulkes, will stand by her whatever she may wish to do. God's blessing be for ever on you both.

Marguerite's voice died away in the silence that still lay over this deserted part of the great city and in this squalid house where she and Sir Andrew Ffoulkes had found shelter these last ten days. The agony of mind which they had here endured never doubting, but scarcely ever hoping, had found its culmination at last in this final message, which almost seemed to come to them from the grave.

It had been written ten days ago. A plan had then apparently formed in Percy's mind which he had set forth during the brief half-hour's respite which those fiends had once given him. Since then they had never given him ten consecutive minutes' peace; since then ten days had gone by; how much power, how much vitality had gone by too on the leaden wings of all those terrible hours spent in solitude and in misery?

"We can but hope, Lady Blakeney," said Sir Andrew Ffoulkes after a while, "that you will be allowed out of Paris; but from what Armand says——"

"And Percy does not actually send me away," she rejoined with a pathetic little smile.

"No. He cannot compel you, Lady Blakeney. You are not a member of the League."

"Oh, yes I am!" she retorted firmly; "and I have sworn obedience, just as all of you have done. I will go, just as he bids me, and you, Sir Andrew, you will obey him too?"

"My orders are to stand by you. That is an easy task."

"You know where this place is?" she asked—"the Château d'Ourde?"

"Oh, yes, we all know it! It is empty, and the park is a wreck; the owner fled from it at the very outbreak of the revolution; he left some kind of steward nominally in charge, a curious creature, half imbecile; the château and the chapel in the forest just outside the grounds have oft served Blakeney and all of us as a place of refuge on our way to the coast."

"But the Dauphin is not there?" she said.

"No. According to the first letter which you brought me from Blakeney ten days ago, and on which I acted, Tony, who has charge of the Dauphin, must have crossed into Holland with his little Majesty to-day."

"I understand," she said simply. "But then—this letter to de Batz?"

"Ah, there I am completely at sea! But I'll deliver it, and at once too, only I don't like to leave you. Will you let me get you out of Paris first? I think just before dawn it could be done. We can get the cart from Lucas, and if we could reach St. Germain before noon, I could come straight back then and deliver the letter to de Batz. This, I feel I ought to do myself; but at Achard's farm I would know that you were safe for a few hours."

"I will do whatever you think right, Sir Andrew," she said simply; "my will is bound up with Percy's dying wish. God knows I would rather follow him now, step by step—as hostage, as prisoner—any way so long as I can see him, but——"

She rose and turned to go, almost impassive now in that great calm born of despair.

A stranger seeing her now had thought her indifferent. She was very pale, and deep circles round her eyes told of sleepless nights and days of mental misery, but otherwise there was not the faintest outward symptom of that terrible anguish which was rending her heart-strings. Her lips did not quiver, and the source of her tears had been dried up ten days ago.

"Ten minutes and I'll be ready, Sir Andrew," she said. "I have but few belongings. Will you the while see Lucas about the cart?"

He did as she desired. Her calm in no way deceived him; he knew that she must be suffering keenly, and would suffer more keenly still while she would be trying to efface her own personal feelings all through that coming dreary journey to Calais.

He went to see the landlord about the horse and cart and a quarter of an hour later Marguerite came downstairs ready to start. She found Sir Andrew in close converse with an officer of the Garde de Paris, whilst two soldiers of the same regiment were standing at the horse's head.

When she appeared in the doorway Sir Andrew came at once up to her.

"It is just as I feared, Lady Blakeney," he said; "this man has been sent here to take charge of you. Of course, he knows nothing beyond the fact that his orders are to convey you at once to the guard-house of the Rue Ste. Anne, where he is to hand you over to citizen Chauvelin of the Committee of Public Safety."

Sir Andrew could not fail to see the look of intense relief, which in the midst of all her sorrow, seemed suddenly to have lighted up the whole of Marguerite's wan face. The thought of wending her own way to safety whilst Percy, mayhap, was fighting an uneven fight with death had been wellnigh intolerable; but she had been ready to obey without a murmur. Now

Fate and the enemy himself had decided otherwise. She felt as if a load had been lifted from her heart.

"I will at once go and find de Batz," Sir Andrew contrived to whisper hurriedly. "As soon as Percy's letter is safely in his hands I will make my way northwards and communicate with all the members of the League, on whom the chief has so strictly enjoined to quit French soil immediately. We will proceed to Calais first and open up communication with the *Day Dream* in the usual way. The others had best embark on board her, and the skipper shall then make for the known spot off Le Portel, of which Percy speaks in his letter. I myself will go by land to Le Portel, and thence, if I have no news of you or of the expedition, I will slowly work southwards in the direction of the Château d'Ourde. That is all I can do. If you can contrive to let Percy or even Armand know my movements, do so by all means. I know that I shall be doing right, for, in a way, I shall be watching over you and arranging for your safety, as Blakeney begged me to do. God bless you, Lady Blakeney, and God save the Scarlet Pimpernel!"

He stooped and kissed her hand, and she intimated to the officer that she was ready. He had a hackney coach waiting for her lower down the street. To it she walked with a firm step, and as she entered it she waved a last farewell to Sir Andrew Ffoulkes.

42

THE GUARD-HOUSE OF THE RUE STE. ANNE

THE little cortège was turning out of the great gates of the house of Justice. It was intensely cold; a bitter north-easterly gale was blowing from across the heights of Montmartre, driving sleet and snow and half-frozen rain into the faces of the men, and finding its way up their sleeves, down their collars, and round the knees of their threadbare breeches.

Armand, whose fingers were numb with the cold, could scarcely feel the reins in his hands. Chauvelin was riding close beside him, but the two men had not exchanged one word since the moment when the small troop of some twenty mounted soldiers had filed up inside the courtyard, and Chauvelin, with a curt word of command, had ordered one of the troopers to take Armand's horse on the lead.

A hackney coach brought up the rear of the cortège with a man riding at either door and two more following at a distance of twenty paces. Héron's gaunt, ugly face, crowned with a battered sugar-loaf hat, appeared from time to time at the window of the coach. He was no horseman, and, moreover, preferred to keep the prisoner closely under his own eye. The corporal had told Armand that the prisoner was with citizen Héron inside the coach—in irons. Beyond that, the soldiers could tell him nothing; they knew nothing of the object of this expedition. Vaguely they might have wondered in their dull minds why this particular prisoner was thus being escorted out of the Conciergerie Prison with so much paraphernalia and such an air of mystery when there were thousands of prisoners in the city and the provinces at the present moment who anon would be bundled up wholesale into carts, to be dragged to the guillotine like a flock of sheep to the butcher's.

But, even if they wondered, they made no remarks among themselves. Their faces, blue with the cold, were the perfect mirrors of their own unconquerable stolidity.

The tower-clock of Notre Dame struck seven when the small cavalcade finally moved out of the monumental gates. In the east the wan light of a February morning slowly struggled out of the surrounding gloom. Now the towers of many churches loomed ghostlike against the dull grey sky, and down below, on the right, the frozen river, like a smooth sheet of steel, wound its graceful curves round the islands and past the façade of the Louvre palace, whose walls looked grim and silent, like the mausoleum of the dead giants of the past.

All around the great city gave signs of awakening; the business of the day renewed its course every twenty-four hours, despite the tragedies of death and of dishonour that walked with it hand in hand. From the Place de la Révolution the intermittent roll of drums came from time to time, with its muffled sound striking the ear of the passer-by. Along the quay opposite an open-air camp was already astir; men, women, and children, engaged in the great task of clothing and feeding the people of France, armed against tyranny, were bending to their task, even before the wintry dawn had spread its pale-grey tints over the narrower streets of the city.

Armand shivered under his cloak. This silent ride beneath the leaden sky, through the veil of half-frozen rain and snow, seemed like a dream to him. And now, as the outriders of the little cavalcade turned to cross the Pont au Change, he saw spread out on his left what appeared like the living panorama of these three weeks that had just gone by. He could see the house of the Rue St. Germain l'Auxerrois, where Percy had lodged before he carried through the rescue of the little Dauphin. Armand could even see the window at which the dreamer had stood, weaving noble dreams that his brilliant daring had turned into realities, until the hand of a traitor had brought him down to—to what? Armand would not have dared at this moment to look back at that hideous vulgar hackney coach wherein that proud, reckless adventurer, who had defied Fate and mocked Death, sat—in chains—beside a loathsome creature whose very propinquity was an outrage.

Now they were passing under the very house on the Quai de la Ferraille, above the saddler's shop, the house where Marguerite had lodged ten days ago, whither Armand had come, trying to fool himself into the belief that the love of the "little mother" could be deceived into blindness against his own crime. He had tried to draw a veil before those eyes which he had scarcely dared encounter; but he knew that that veil must lift one day, and then a curse would send him forth, outlawed and homeless, a wanderer on the face of the earth.

Soon as the little cortège wended its way northwards it filed out beneath the walls of the Temple Prison; there was the main gate, with its sentry standing at attention; there the archway, with the *guichet* of the concierge, and beyond it the paved courtyard. Armand closed his eyes deliberately; he could not bear to look.

No wonder that he shivered and tried to draw his cloak closer around him. Every stone, every street corner was full of memories. The chill that struck to the very marrow of his bones came from no outward cause; it was the very hand of remorse that, as it passed over him, froze the blood in his veins and made the rattle of those coach-wheels behind him sound like a hellish knell.

At last the more closely-populated quarters of the city were left behind. On ahead the first section of the guard had turned into the Rue Ste. Anne. The houses became more sparse, intersected by narrow pieces of *terrains vagues*, or small weed-covered bits of kitchen garden.

Then a halt was called.

It was quite light now. As light as it would ever be beneath this leaden sky. Rain and snow still fell in gusts, driven by the blast.

Some one ordered Armand to dismount. It was probably Chauvelin. He did as he was told, and a trooper led him to the door of an irregular brick building that stood isolated on the right, extended on either side by a low wall, and surrounded by a patch of uncultivated land, which now looked like a sea of mud.

On ahead was the line of fortifications, dimly outlined against the grey of the sky, and in between brown sodden earth, with here and there a detached house, a cabbage patch, a couple of windmills deserted and desolate.

The loneliness of an unpopulated outlying quarter of the great mother city, a useless limb of her active body, an ostracized member of her vast family.

Mechanically Armand had followed the soldier to the door of the building. Here Chauvelin was standing, and bade him follow. A smell of hot coffee hung in the dark narrow passage in front. Chauvelin led the way to a room on the left.

Still that smell of hot coffee. Ever after it was associated in Armand's mind with this awful morning in the guard-house of the Rue Ste. Anne, when the rain and snow beat against the windows, and he stood there in the low guard-room shivering and half-numbed with cold.

There was a table in the middle of the room, and on it stood cups of hot coffee. Chauvelin bade him drink, suggesting, not unkindly, that the warm beverage would do him good. Armand advanced further into the room, and saw that there were wooden benches all round against the wall. On one of these sat his sister Marguerite.

When she saw him she made a sudden, instinctive movement to go to him, but Chauvelin interposed in his usual bland, quiet manner.

"Not just now, citizeness," he said.

She sat down again, and Armand noted how cold and stony seemed her eyes, as if life within her was at a standstill and a shadow that was almost like death had atrophied every emotion in her.

"I trust you have not suffered too much from the cold, Lady Blakeney," resumed Chauvelin politely; "we ought not to have kept you waiting here for so long, but delay at departure is sometimes inevitable."

She made no reply, only acknowledging his reiterated inquiry as to her comfort with an inclination of the head.

Armand had forced himself to swallow some coffee, and for the moment he felt less chilled. He held the cup between his two hands, and gradually some warmth crept into his bones.

"Little mother," he said in English, "try and drink some of this, it will do you good."

"Thank you, dear," she replied. "I have had some. I am not cold."

Then a door at the end of the room was pushed open, and Héron stalked in.

"Are we going to be all day in this confounded hole?" he queried roughly.

Armand, who was watching his sister very closely, saw that she started at sight of the wretch, and seemed immediately to shrink still further within herself, whilst her eyes, suddenly luminous and dilated, rested on him like those of a captive bird upon an approaching cobra.

But Chauvelin was not to be shaken out of his suave manner.

"One moment, citizen Héron," he said; "this coffee is very comforting. Is the prisoner with you?" he added lightly.

Héron nodded in the direction of the other room.

"In there," he said curtly.

"Then, perhaps if you will be so good, citizen, to invite him hither, I could explain to him his future position and our own."

Héron muttered something between his fleshy lips, then he turned back towards the open door, solemnly spat twice on the threshold, and nodded his gaunt head once or twice in a manner which apparently was understanded from within.

"No, sergeant, I don't want you," he said gruffly; "only the prisoner."

A second or two later Sir Percy Blakeney stood in the doorway; his hands were behind his back, obviously handcuffed, but he held himself very erect, though it was clear that this caused him a mighty effort. As soon as he had crossed the threshold his quick glance had swept right round the room.

He saw Armand, and his eyes lit up almost imperceptibly.

Then he caught sight of Marguerite, and his pale face took on suddenly a more ashen hue.

Chauvelin was watching him with those keen, light-coloured eyes of his. Blakeney, conscious of this, made no movement, only his lips tightened, and the heavy lids fell over the hollow eyes, completely hiding their glance.

But what even the most astute, most deadly enemy could not see was that subtle message of understanding that passed at once between Marguerite and the man she loved; it was a magnetic current, intangible, invisible to all save to her and to him. She was prepared to see him, prepared to see him in all that she had feared: the weakness, the mental exhaustion, the submission to the inevitable. Therefore she had also schooled her glance to express to him all that she knew she would not be allowed to say—the reassurance that she had read in his last letter, that she had obeyed it to the last word, save where Fate and her enemy had interfered with regard to herself.

With a slight, imperceptible movement—imperceptible to every one save to him, she had seemed to handle a piece of paper in her kerchief, then she had nodded slowly, with her eyes—steadfast, reassuring—fixed upon him: and his glance gave answer that he had understood.

But Chauvelin and Héron had seen nothing of this. They were satisfied that there had been no communication between the prisoner and his wife and friend.

"You are no doubt surprised, Sir Percy," said Chauvelin after a while, "to see Lady Blakeney here. She, as well as citizen St. Just, will accompany our expedition to the place where you will lead us. We none of us know where that place is—citizen Héron and myself are entirely in your hands—you might be leading us to certain death, or again to a spot where your own escape would be an easy matter to yourself. You will not be surprised, therefore, that we have thought fit to take certain precautions both against any little ambuscade which you may have prepared for us, or against your making one of those daring attempts at escape for which the noted Scarlet Pimpernel is so justly famous."

He paused, and only Héron's low chuckle of satisfaction broke the momentary silence that followed. Blakeney made no reply. Obviously he knew exactly what was coming. He knew Chauvelin and his ways, knew the kind of tortuous conception that would find origin in his brain; the moment that he saw Marguerite sitting there he must have guessed that Chauvelin once more desired to put her precious life in the balance of his intrigues.

"Citizen Héron is impatient, Sir Percy," resumed Chauvelin after a while, "so I must be brief. Lady Blakeney, as well as citizen St. Just, will accompany us on this expedition to whithersoever you may lead us. They will be the hostages which we will hold against your own good faith. At the slightest suspicion—a mere suspicion perhaps—that you have played us false, at a hint that you have led us into an ambush, or that the whole of this expedition has been but a trick on your part to effect your own escape, or if merely our hope of finding Capet at the end of our journey is frustrated, the lives of our two hostages belong to us, and your friend and your wife will be summarily shot before your eyes."

Outside the rain pattered against the window-panes, the gale whistled mournfully among the stunted trees, but within this room not a sound stirred the deadly stillness of the air, and yet at this moment hatred and love, savage lust and sublime self-abnegation—the most powerful passions the heart of man can know—held three men here enchained; each a slave to his dominant passion, each ready to stake his all for the satisfaction of his master. Héron was the first to speak.

"Well!" he said with a fierce oath, "what are we waiting for? The prisoner knows how he stands. Now we can go."

"One moment, citizen," interposed Chauvelin, his quiet manner contrasting strangely with his colleague's savage mood. "You have quite understood, Sir Percy," he continued, directly addressing the prisoner, "the conditions under which we are all of us about to proceed on this journey?"

"All of us?" said Blakeney slowly. "Are you taking it for granted then that I accept your conditions and that I am prepared to proceed on the journey?"

"If you do not proceed on the journey," cried Héron with savage fury, "I'll strangle that woman with my own hands—now!"

Blakeney looked at him for a moment or two through half-closed lids, and it seemed then to those who knew him well, to those who loved him and to the man who hated him, that the mighty sinews almost cracked with the passionate desire to kill. Then the sunken eyes turned slowly to Marguerite, and she alone caught the look—it was a mere flash, of a humble appeal for pardon.

It was all over in a second; almost immediately the tension on the pale face relaxed, and into the eyes there came that look of acceptance—nearly akin to fatalism—an acceptance of which the strong alone are capable, for with them it only comes in the face of the inevitable.

Now he shrugged his broad shoulders, and once more turning to Héron he said quietly:

"You leave me no option in that case. As you have remarked before, citizen Héron, why should we wait any longer? Surely we can now go."

43

THE DREARY JOURNEY

RAIN! Rain! Rain! Incessant, monotonous and dreary! The wind had changed round to the south-west. It blew now in great gusts that sent weird, sighing sounds through the trees, and drove the heavy showers into the faces of the men as they rode on, with heads bent forward against the gale.

The rain-sodden bridles slipped through their hands, bringing out sores and blisters on their palms; the horses were fidgety, tossing their heads with wearying persistence as the wet trickled into their ears, or the sharp, intermittent hailstones struck their sensitive noses.

Three days of this awful monotony; varied only by the halts at wayside inns, the changing of troops at one of the guard-houses on the way, the reiterated commands given to the fresh squad before starting on the next lap of this strange, momentous way; and all the while, audible above the clatter of horses' hoofs, the rumbling of coach-wheels—two closed carriages, each drawn by a pair of sturdy horses, which were changed at every halt. A soldier on each box urged them to a good pace to keep up with the troopers, who were allowed to go at an easy canter or light jog-trot whatever might prove easiest and least fatiguing. And from time to time Héron's shaggy, gaunt head would appear at the window of one of the coaches, asking the way, the distance to the next city or to the nearest wayside inn; cursing the troopers, the coachman, his colleague and every one concerned, blaspheming against the interminable length of the road, against the cold and against the wet.

Early in the evening on the second day of the journey he had met with an accident. The prisoner, who presumably was weak and weary, and not over steady on his feet, had fallen up against him as they were both about to re-enter the coach after a halt just outside Amiens, and citizen Héron had lost his footing in the slippery mud of the road. His head came in violent contact with the step, and his right temple was severely cut. Since then he had been forced to wear a bandage across the top of his face, under his sugar-loaf hat, which had added nothing to his beauty, but a great deal to the violence of his temper. He wanted to push the men on, to force the pace, to shorten the halts; but Chauvelin knew better than to allow slackness and discontent to follow in the wake of over-fatigue.

The soldiers were always well rested and well fed, and though the delay caused by long and frequent halts must have been just as irksome to him as it was to Héron, yet he bore it imperturbably, for he would have had no use on this momentous journey for a handful of men whose enthusiasm and spirit had been blown away by the roughness of the gale, or drowned in the fury of the constant downpour of rain.

Of all this Marguerite had been conscious in a vague, dreamy kind of way. She seemed to herself like the spectator in a moving panoramic drama, unable to raise a finger or to do aught to stop that final, inevitable ending, the cataclysm of sorrow and misery that awaited her, when the dreary curtain would fall on the last act, and she and all the other spectators —Armand, Chauvelin, Héron, the soldiers—would slowly wend their way home, leaving the principal actor behind the fallen curtain which never would be lifted again.

After that first halt in the guard-room of the Rue Ste. Anne she had been bidden to enter a second hackney coach, which followed the other at a distance of fifty mètres or so, and was, like that other, closely surrounded by a squad of mounted men.

Armand and Chauvelin rode in this carriage with her; all day she sat looking out on the endless monotony of the road, on the drops of rain that pattered against the window-glass, and ran down from it like a perpetual stream of tears.

There were two halts called during the day—one for dinner and one midway through the afternoon—when she and Armand would step out of the coach and be led—always with soldiers close around them—to some wayside inn, where some sort of a meal was served, where the atmosphere was close and stuffy and smelt of onion soup and of stale cheese.

Armand and Marguerite would in most cases have a room to themselves, with sentinels posted outside the door, and they would try and eat enough to keep body and soul together, for they would not allow their strength to fall away before the end of the journey was reached.

For the night halt—once at Beauvais and the second night at Abbeville—they were escorted to a house in the interior of the city, where they were accommodated with moderately clean lodgings. Sentinels, however, were always at their doors; they were prisoners in all but name, and had little or no privacy; for at night they were both so tired that they were glad to retire immediately, and to lie down on the hard beds that had been provided for them, even if sleep fled from their eyes, and their hearts and souls were flying through the city in search of him who filled their every thought.

Of Percy they saw little or nothing. In the daytime food was evidently brought to him in the carriage, for they did not see him get down, and on those two nights at Beauvais and Abbeville, when they caught sight of him stepping out of the coach outside the gates of the barracks, he was so surrounded by soldiers that they only saw the top of his head and his broad shoulders towering above those of the men.

Once Marguerite had put all her pride, all her dignity by, and asked citizen Chauvelin for news of her husband.

"He is well and cheerful, Lady Blakeney," he had replied with his sarcastic smile. "Ah!" he added pleasantly, "those English are remarkable people. We, of Gallic breed, will never really understand them. Their fatalism is quite Oriental in its quiet resignation to the decree of Fate. Did you know, Lady Blakeney, that when Sir Percy was arrested, he did not raise a hand. I thought, and so did my colleague, that he would have fought like a lion. And now that he has no doubt realized that quiet submission will serve him best in the end, he is as calm on this journey as I am myself. In fact," he concluded complacently, "whenever I have succeeded in peeping into the coach I have invariably found Sir Percy Blakeney fast asleep."

"He"—she murmured for it was so difficult to speak to this callous wretch, who was obviously mocking her in her misery—"he—you—you are not keeping him in irons?"

"No! Oh, no!" replied Chauvelin with perfect urbanity. "You see, now that we have you, Lady Blakeney, and citizen St. Just with us we have no reason to fear that that elusive Pimpernel will spirit himself away."

A hot retort had risen to Armand's lips. The warm Latin blood in him rebelled against this intolerable situation, the man's sneers in the face of Marguerite's anguish. But her restraining, gentle hand had already pressed his. What was the use of protesting, of insulting this brute, who cared nothing for the misery which he had caused so long as he gained his own ends?

And Armand held his tongue and tried to curb his temper, tried to cultivate a little of that fatalism which Chauvelin had said was characteristic of the English. He sat beside his sister, longing to comfort her, yet feeling that his very presence near her was an outrage and a sacrilege. She spoke so seldom to him, even when they were alone, that at times the awful thought which had more than once found birth in his weary brain became crystallized and more real. Did Marguerite guess? Had she the slightest suspicion that the awful cataclysm to which they were tending with every revolution of the creaking coach-wheels, had been brought about by her brother's treacherous hand?

And when that thought had lodged itself quite snugly in his mind he began to wonder whether it would not be far more simple, far more easy, to end his miserable life in some manner that might suggest itself on the way. When the coach crossed one of those dilapidated, parapetless bridges, over abysses fifty mètres deep, it might be so easy to throw open the carriage door and to take one final jump into eternity.

So easy—but so damnably cowardly.

Marguerite's near presence quickly brought him back to himself. His life was no longer his own to do with as he pleased; it belonged to the chief whom he had betrayed, to the sister whom he must endeavour to protect.

Of Jeanne now he thought but little. He had put even the memory of her by—tenderly, like a sprig of lavender pressed between the faded leaves of his own happiness. His hand was no longer fit to hold that of any pure woman—his hand had on it a deep stain, immutable, like the brand of Cain.

Yet Marguerite beside him held his hand, and together they looked out on that dreary, dreary road and listened to the patter of the rain and the rumbling of the wheels of that other coach on ahead; and it was all so dismal and so horrible—the rain, the soughing of the wind in the stunted trees, this landscape of mud and desolation, this eternally grey sky.

44

THE HALT AT CRÉCY

"Now, then, citizen, don't go to sleep: this is Crécy, our last halt!"

Armand woke up from his last dream. They had been moving steadily on since they left Abbeville soon after dawn; the rumble of the wheels, the swaying and rocking of the carriage, the interminable patter of the rain had lulled him into a kind of wakeful sleep.

Chauvelin had already alighted from the coach. He was helping Marguerite to descend. Armand shook the stiffness from his limbs and followed in the wake of his sister. Always those miserable soldiers round them, with their dank coats of rough blue cloth and the red caps on their heads! Armand pulled Marguerite's hand through his arm, and dragged her with him into the house.

The small city lay damp and grey before them;

the rough pavement of the narrow street glistened with the wet, reflecting the dull, leaden sky overhead; the rain beat into the puddles; the slate-roofs shone in the cold wintry night.

This was Crécy! The last halt of the journey, so Chauvelin had said. The party had drawn rein in front of a small one-storied building that had a wooden verandah running the whole length of its front.

The usual low narrow room greeted Armand and Marguerite as they entered; the usual mildewed walls, with the colour-wash flowing away in streaks from the unsympathetic beam above; the same device, "Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité!" scribbled in charcoal above the black iron stove; the usual musty, close atmosphere; the usual smell of onion and stale cheese; the usual hard, straight benches and central table with its soiled and tattered cloth.

Marguerite seemed dazed and giddy; she had been five hours in that stuffy coach with nothing to distract her thoughts except the rain-sodden landscape, on which she had ceaselessly gazed since the early dawn.

Armand led her to the bench, and she sank down on it, numb and inert, resting her elbows on the table and her head in her hands.

"If it were only all over!" she sighed involuntarily. "Armand, at times now I feel as if I were not really sane, as if my reason had already given way! Tell me, do I seem mad to you at times?"

He sat down beside her and tried to chafe her cold little hands.

There was a knock at the door, and without waiting for permission Chauvelin entered the room.

"My humble apologies to you, Lady Blakeney," he said in his usual suave manner, "but our worthy host informs me that this is the only room in which he can serve a meal. Therefore I am forced to intrude my presence upon you."

Though he spoke with outward politeness, his tone had become more peremptory, less bland, and he did not await Marguerite's reply before he sat down opposite to her and continued to talk airily.

"An ill-conditioned fellow, our host," he said—"quite reminds me of our friend Brogard, at the Chat Gris, in Calais? You remember him, Lady Blakeney?"

"My sister is giddy, and over-tired," interposed Armand firmly. "I pray you, citizen, to have some regard for her."

"All the regard in the world, citizen St. Just," protested Chauvelin jovially. "Methought that those pleasant reminiscences would cheer her. Ah! here comes the soup," he added, as a man in blue blouse and breeches, with sabots on his feet, slouched into the room, carrying a tureen which he incontinently placed upon the table. "I feel sure that in England Lady Blakeney misses our excellent croûtes-au-pot, the glory of our bourgeois cookery. Lady Blakeney, a little soup."

"I thank you, sir," she murmured.

"Do try and eat something, little mother," Armand whispered in her ear; "try and keep up your strength, for his sake, if not for mine."

She turned a wan, pale face to him, and tried to smile.

"I'll try, dear," she said.

"You have taken bread and meat to the citizens in the coach?" Chauvelin called out to the retreating figure of mine host.

"H'm!" grunted the latter in assent.

"And see that the citizen soldiers are well fed, or there will be trouble."

"H'm!" grunted the man again. After which he banged the door to behind him.

"Citizen Héron is loath to let the prisoner out of his sight," explained Chauvelin lightly, "now that we have reached the last, most important stage of our journey, so he is sharing Sir Percy's midday meal in the interior of the coach."

He ate his soup with a relish, ostentatiously paying many small attentions to Marguerite all the time. He ordered meat for her—bread, butter—asked if any dainties could be got. He was apparently in the best of tempers.

After he had eaten and drunk he rose and bowed ceremoniously to her.

"Your pardon, Lady Blakeney," he said, "but I must confer with the prisoner now, and take from him full directions for the continuance of our journey. After that I go to the guard-house, which is some distance from here, right at the other end of the city. We pick up a fresh squad here, twenty hardened troopers from a cavalry regiment usually stationed at Abbeville. They have had work to do in this town, which is a hot-bed of treachery. I must go inspect the men, and the sergeant who will be in command. Citizen Héron leaves all these inspections to me; he likes to stay by his prisoner. In the meanwhile you will be escorted back to your coach, where I pray you to await my arrival, when we change guard first, then proceed on our way."

Marguerite was longing to ask him many questions; once again she would have smothered her pride and begged for news of her husband, but Chauvelin did not wait. He hurried out of the room, and Armand and Marguerite could hear him ordering the soldiers to take them forthwith back to the coach.

As they came out of the inn they saw the other coach some fifty mètres further up the street. The horses that had done duty since leaving Abbeville had been taken out, and two soldiers, in ragged shirts and with crimson caps set jauntily over their left ear, were leading the two fresh horses along. The troopers were still mounting guard round both the coaches; they would be relieved presently.

Marguerite would have given ten years of her life at this moment for the privilege of speaking to her husband, or even of seeing him—of seeing that he was well. A quick, wild plan sprang up in her mind that she would bribe the sergeant in command to grant her wish while citizen Chauvelin was absent. The man had not an unkind face, and he must be very poor—people in France were very poor these days, though the rich had been robbed and luxurious homes devastated ostensibly to help the poor.

She was about to put this sudden thought into execution when Héron's hideous face, doubly hideous now with that bandage of doubtful cleanliness cutting across his brow, appeared at the carriage window.

He cursed violently and at the top of his voice.

"What are those d——d aristos doing out there?" he shouted.

"Just getting into the coach, citizen," replied the sergeant promptly.

And Armand and Marguerite were immediately ordered back into the coach.

Héron remained at the window for a few moments longer; he had a toothpick in his hand which he was using very freely.

"How much longer are we going to wait in this cursed hole?" he called out to the sergeant.

"Only a few moments longer, citizen. Citizen Chauvelin will be back soon with the guard."

A quarter of an hour later the clatter of cavalry horses on the rough, uneven pavement drew Marguerite's attention. She lowered the carriage window and looked out. Chauvelin had just returned with the new escort. He was on horseback; his horse's bridle, since he was but an indifferent horseman, was held by one of the troopers.

Outside the inn he dismounted; evidently he had taken full command of the expedition, and scarcely referred to Héron, who spent most of his time cursing at the men or the weather when he was not lying half-asleep and partially drunk in the inside of the carriage.

The changing of the guard was now accomplished quietly and in perfect order. The new escort consisted of twenty mounted men, including a sergeant and a corporal, and of two drivers, one for each coach. The cortège now was filed up in marching order; ahead a small party of scouts, then the coach with Marguerite and Armand closely surrounded by mounted men, and at a small distance the second coach with citizen Héron and the prisoner equally well guarded.

Chauvelin superintended all the arrangements himself. He spoke for some moments with the sergeant, also with the driver of his own coach. He went to the window of the other carriage, probably in order to consult with citizen Héron, or to take final directions from the prisoner, for Marguerite, who was watching him, saw him standing on the step and leaning well forward into the interior, whilst apparently he was taking notes on a small tablet which he had in his hand.

A small knot of idlers had congregated in the narrow street; men in blouses and boys in ragged breeches lounged against the verandah of the inn and gazed with inexpressive, stolid eyes on the soldiers, the coaches, the citizen who wore the tricolour scarf. They had seen this sort of thing before now—aristos being conveyed to Paris under arrest, prisoners on their way to or from Amiens. They saw Marguerite's pale face at the carriage window. It was not the first woman's face they had seen under like circumstances, and there was not special interest about this aristo. They were smoking or spitting, or just lounging idly against the balustrade. Marguerite wondered if none of them had wife, sister, or mother, or child; if every sympathy, every kind feeling in these poor wretches had been atrophied by misery or by fear.

At last everything was in order and the small party ready to start.

"Does anyone know here the Chapel of the Holy Sepulchre, close by the park of the Château d'Ourde?" asked Chauvelin, vaguely addressing the knot of gaffers that stood closest to him.

The men shook their heads. Some had dimly heard of the Château d'Ourde; it was some way in the interior of the forest of Boulogne, but no one knew about a chapel; people did not trouble about chapels nowadays. With the indifference so peculiar to local peasantry, these men knew no more of the surrounding country than the twelve or fifteen league circle that was within a walk of their sleepy little town.

One of the scouts on ahead turned in his saddle and spoke to citizen Chauvelin:

"I think I know the way pretty well, citizen Chauvelin," he said; "at any rate, I know it as far as the forest of Boulogne."

Chauvelin referred to his tablets.

"That's good," he said; "then when you reach the milestone that stands on this road at the confine of the forest, bear sharply to your right and skirt the wood until you see the hamlet of—Le—something. Le—Le—yes—Le Crocq—that's in the valley below."

"I know Le Crocq, I think," said the trooper.

"Very well, then; at that point it seems that a wide road strikes at right angles into the interior of the forest; you follow that until a stone chapel with a colonnaded porch stands before you on your left, and the walls and gates of a park on your right. That is so, is it not, Sir Percy?" he added, once more turning towards the interior of the coach.

Apparently the answer satisfied him, for he gave the quick word of command, "En avant!" then turned back towards his own coach and finally entered it.

"Do you know the Château d'Ourde, citizen St. Just?" he asked abruptly as soon as the carriage began to move.

Armand woke—as was habitual with him these days—from some gloomy reverie.

"Yes, citizen," he replied. "I know it."

"And the Chapel of the Holy Sepulchre?"

"Yes. I know it too."

Indeed, he knew the château well, and the little chapel in the forest, whither the fisher-folk from Portel and Boulogne came on a pilgrimage once a year to lay their nets on the miracle-working relic. The chapel was disused now. Since the owner of the château had fled no one had tended it, and the fisher-folk were afraid to wander out, lest their superstitious faith be counted against them by the authorities, who had abolished *le bon Dieu*.

But Armand had found refuge there eighteen months ago, on his way to Calais, when Percy had risked his life in order to save him—Armand—from death. He could have groaned aloud with the anguish of this recollection. But Marguerite's aching nerves had thrilled at the name.

The Château d'Ourde! The Chapel of the Holy Sepulchre! That was the place which Percy had mentioned in his letter, the place where he had given rendezvous to de Batz. Sir Andrew had said that the Dauphin could not possibly be there, yet Percy was leading his enemies thither, and had given the rendezvous there to de Batz. And this despite that whatever plans, whatever hopes, had been born in his mind when he was still immured in the Conciergerie Prison must have been set at naught by the clever counterplot of Chauvelin and Héron.

"At the merest suspicion that you have played us false, at a hint that you have led us into an ambush, or if merely our hopes of finding Capet at the end of the journey are frustrated, the lives of your wife and of your friend are forfeit to us, and they will both be shot before your eyes."

With these words, with this precaution, those cunning fiends had effectually not only tied the schemer's hands, but forced him either to deliver the child to them or to sacrifice his wife and the friend.

The *impasse* was so horrible that she could not face it even in her thoughts. A strange, fever-like heat coursed through her veins, yet left her hands icy-cold; she longed for, yet dreaded, the end of the journey—that awful grappling with the certainty of coming death. Perhaps, after all, Percy too had given up all hope. Long ago he had consecrated his life to the attainment of his own ideals; and there was a vein of fatalism in him; perhaps he had resigned himself to the inevitable, and his only desire now was to give up his life, as he had said, in the open, beneath God's sky, to draw his last breath with the storm-clouds tossed through infinity above him, and the murmur of the wind in the trees to sing him to rest.

Crécy was gradually fading away into the distance, wrapped in a mantle of damp and mist. For a long while Marguerite could see the sloping slate roofs glimmering like steel in the grey afternoon light, and the quaint church tower with its beautiful lantern, through the pierced stonework of which shone patches of the leaden sky.

Then a sudden twist of the road hid the city from view; only the outlying churchyard remained in sight, with its white monuments and granite crosses, over which the dark yews, wet with the rain and shaken by the gale, sent showers of diamond-like sprays.

45

THE FOREST OF BOULOGNE

PROGRESS was not easy, and very slow along the muddy road; the two coaches moved along laboriously, with wheels creaking and sinking deeply from time to time in the quagmire.

When the small party finally reached the edge of the wood the greyish light of this dismal day had changed in the west to a dull reddish glow—a glow that had neither brilliance nor incandescence in it; only a weird tint that hung over the horizon and turned the distance into lines of purple.

The nearness of the sea made itself already felt; there was a briny taste in the damp atmosphere, and the trees all turned their branches away in the same direction against the onslaught on the prevailing winds.

The road at this point formed a sharp fork, skirting the wood on either side, the forest lying like a black close mass of spruce and firs on the left, while the open expanse of country stretched out on the right. The south-westerly gale struck with full violence against the barrier of forest trees, bending the tall crests of the pines and causing their small dead branches to break and fall with a sharp, crisp sound like a cry of pain.

The squad had been fresh at starting; now the men had been four hours in the saddle under persistent rain and gusty wind; they were tired and the atmosphere of the close, black forest so near the road was weighing upon their spirits.

Strange sounds came to them from out the dense network of trees—the screeching of night-birds, the weird call of the owls, the swift and furtive tread of wild beasts on the prowl. The cold winter and lack of food had lured the wolves from their fastnesses—hunger had emboldened them, and now, as gradually the grey light fled from the sky, dismal howls could be heard in the distance, and now and then a pair of eyes, bright with the reflection of the lurid western glow, would shine momentarily out of the darkness like tiny glow-worms, and as quickly vanish away.

The men shivered—more with vague superstitious fear than with cold. They would have urged their horses on, but the wheels of the coaches stuck persistently in the mud, and now and again a halt had to be called so that the spokes and axles might be cleared.

They rode on in silence. No one had a mind to speak, and the mournful soughing of the wind in the pine-trees seemed to check the words on every lip. The dull thud of hoofs in the soft road, the clang of steel bits and buckles, the snorting of the horses alone answered the wind, and also the monotonous creaking of the wheels ploughing through the ruts.

Soon the ruddy glow in the west faded into soft-toned purple and then into grey; finally that too vanished. Darkness was drawing in on every side like a wide, black mantle pulled together closer and closer overhead by invisible giant hands.

The rain still fell in a thin drizzle that soaked through caps and coats, made the bridles slimy and the saddles slippery and damp. A veil of vapour hung over the horses' cruppers, and was rendered fuller and thicker every moment with the breath that came from their nostrils. The wind no longer blew with gusty fury —its strength seemed to have been spent with the grey light of day—but now and then it would still come sweeping across the open country, and dash itself upon the wall of forest trees, lashing against the horses' ears, catching the corner of a mantle here, an ill-adjusted cap there, and wreaking its mischievous freak for a while, then with a sigh of satisfaction die, murmuring among the pines.

Suddenly there was a halt, much shouting, a volley of oaths from the drivers, and citizen Chauvelin thrust his head out of the carriage window.

"What is it?" he asked.

"The scouts, citizen," replied the sergeant, who had been riding close to the coach door all this while; "they have returned."

"Tell one man to come straight to me and report."

Marguerite sat quite still. Indeed, she had almost ceased to live momentarily, for her spirit was absent from her body, which felt neither fatigue, nor cold, nor pain. But she heard the snorting of the horse close by as his rider pulled him up sharply beside the carriage door.

"Well?" said Chauvelin curtly.

"This is the cross-road, citizen," replied the man; "it strikes straight into the wood, and the hamlet of Le Crocq lies down in the valley on the right."

"Did you follow the road in the wood?"

"Yes, citizen. About two leagues from here there is a clearing with a small stone chapel, more like a large shrine, nestling among the trees. Opposite to it the angle of a high wall with large wrought-iron gates at the corner, and from these a wide drive leads through a park."

"Did you turn into the drive?"

"Only a little way, citizen. We thought we had best report first that all is safe."

"You saw no one?"

"No one."

"The château, then, lies some distance from the gates?"

"A league or more, citizen. Close to the gates there are outhouses and stabling, the disused buildings of the home farm, I should say."

"Good! We are on the right road, that is clear. Keep ahead with your men now, but only some two hundred mètres or so. Stay!" he added, as if on second thoughts. "Ride down to the other coach and ask the prisoner if we are on the right track."

The rider turned his horse sharply round. Marguerite heard the clang of metal and the sound of retreating hoofs.

A few moments later the man returned.

"Yes, citizen," he reported, "the prisoner says it is quite right. The Château d'Ourde lies a full league from its gates. This is the nearest road to the chapel and the château. He says we should reach the former in half an hour. It will be very dark in there," he added with a significant nod in the direction of the wood.

Chauvelin made no reply, but quietly stepped out of the coach. Marguerite watched him, leaning out of the window, following his small trim figure as he pushed his way past the groups of mounted men, catching at a horse's bit now and then, or at a bridle, making a way for himself amongst the restless, champing animals, without the slightest hesitation or fear.

Soon his retreating figure lost its sharp outline silhouetted against the evening sky. It was enfolded in the veil of vapour which was blown out of the horses' nostrils or rising from their damp cruppers; it became more vague, almost ghostlike, through the mist and the fast-gathering gloom.

Presently a group of troopers hid him entirely from her view, but she could hear his thin, smooth voice quite clearly as he called to citizen Héron.

"We are close to the end of our journey now, citizen," she heard him say. "If the prisoner has not played us false little Capet should be in our charge within the hour."

A growl not unlike those that came from out the mysterious depths of the forest answered him.

"If he is not," and Marguerite recognized the harsh tones of citizen Héron—"if he is not, then two corpses will be rotting in this wood to-morrow for the wolves to feed on, and the prisoner will be on his way back to Paris with me."

Some one laughed. It might have been one of the troopers, more callous than his comrades, but to

Marguerite the laugh had a strange, familiar ring in it, the echo of something long since past and gone.

Then Chauvelin's voice once more came clearly to her ear:

"My suggestion, citizen," he was saying, "is that the prisoner shall now give me an order—couched in whatever terms he may think necessary—but a distinct order to his friends to give up Capet to me without any resistance; I could then take some of the men with me, and ride as quickly as the light will allow up to the château, and take possession of it, of Capet, and of those who are with him. We could get along faster thus. One man can give up his horse to me and continue the journey on the box of your coach. The two carriages could then follow at foot pace. But I fear that if we stick together complete darkness will overtake us and we might find ourselves obliged to pass a very uncomfortable night in this wood."

"I won't spend another night in this suspense—it would kill me," growled Héron to the accompaniment of one of his choicest oaths. "You must do as you think right—you planned the whole of this affair—see to it that it works out well in the end."

"How many men shall I take with me? Our advance guard is here, of course."

"I couldn't spare you more than four more men—I shall want the others to guard the prisoners."

"Four men will be quite sufficient, with the four of the advance guard. That will leave you twelve men for guarding your prisoners, and you really only need to guard the woman—her life will answer for the others."

He had raised his voice when he said this, obviously intending that Marguerite and Armand should hear.

"Then I'll ahead," he continued, apparently in answer to an assent from his colleague. "Sir Percy, will you be so kind as to scribble the necessary words on these tablets?"

There was a long pause, during which Marguerite heard plainly the long and dismal cry of a night-bird that, mayhap, was seeking its mate. Then Chauvelin's voice was raised again.

"I thank you," he said; "this certainly should be quite effectual. And now, citizen Héron, I do not think that under the circumstances we need fear an ambuscade or any kind of trickery—you hold the hostages. And if by any chance I and my men are attacked, or if we encounter armed resistance at the château, I will despatch a rider back straightway to you, and—well, you will know what to do."

His voice died away, merged in the soughing of the wind, drowned by the clang of metal, of horses snorting, of men living and breathing. Marguerite felt that beside her Armand had shuddered, and that in the darkness his trembling hand had sought and found hers.

She leaned well out of the window, trying to see. The gloom had gathered more closely in, and round her the veil of vapour from the horses' steaming cruppers hung heavily in the misty air. In front of her the straight lines of a few fir trees stood out dense and black against the greyness beyond, and between these lines purple tints of various tones and shades mingled one with the other, merging the horizon line with the sky. Here and there a more solid black patch indicated the tiny houses of the hamlet of Le Crocq far down in the valley below; from some of these houses small lights began to glimmer like blinking yellow eyes. Marguerite's gaze, however, did not rest on the distant landscape—it tried to pierce the gloom that hid her immediate surroundings; the mounted men were all round the coach—more closely round her than the trees in the forest. But the horses were restless, moving all the time, and as they moved she caught glimpses of that other coach and of Chauvelin's ghostlike figure, walking rapidly through the mist. Just for one brief moment she saw the other coach, and Héron's head and shoulders leaning out of the window. His sugar-loaf hat was on his head, and the bandage across his brow looked like a sharp, pale streak below it.

"Do not doubt it, Citizen Chauvelin," he called out loudly in his harsh, raucous voice, "I shall know what to do; the wolves will have their meal to-night, and the guillotine will not be cheated either.

Armand put his arm round his sister's shoulders and gently drew her back into the carriage.

"Little mother," he said, "if you can think of a way whereby my life would redeem Percy's and yours, show me that way now."

But she replied quietly and firmly:

"There is no way, Armand. If there is, it is in the hands of God."

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OTHERS IN THE PARK

Chauvelin and his picked escort had in the meanwhile detached themselves from the main body of the squad. Soon the dull thud of their horses' hoofs treading the soft ground came more softly—then more softly still as they turned into the woodland; the purple shadows seemed to enfold every sound and finally to swallow them completely.

Armand and Marguerite from the depth of the carriage heard Héron's voice ordering his own driver now to take the lead. They sat quite still and watched, and presently the other coach passed them slowly on the road, its silhouette standing out ghostly and grim for a moment against the indigo tones of the distant country.

Héron's head, with its battered sugar-loaf hat, and the soiled bandage round the brow, was as usual out of the carriage window. He leered across at Marguerite when he saw the outline of her face framed by the window of the carriage.

"Say all the prayers you have ever known, citizeness," he said with a loud laugh, "that my friend Chauvelin may find Capet at the château, or else you may take a last look at the open country, for you will not see the sun rise on it to-morrow. It is one or the other, you know."

She tried not to look at him; the very sight of him filled her with horror—that blotched, gaunt face of his, the fleshy lips, that hideous bandage across his face, that hid one of his eyes! She tried not to see him and not to hear him laugh.

Obviously he too laboured under the stress of great excitement. So far everything had gone well; the prisoner had made no attempt at escape, and apparently did not mean to play a double game. But the crucial hour had come, and with it darkness and the mysterious depths of the forest, with their weird sounds and sudden flashes of ghostly lights. They naturally wrought on the nerves of a man like Héron, whose conscience might have been dormant, but whose ears were nevertheless filled with the cries of innocent victims sacrificed to his own lustful ambitions and blind, unreasoning hate.

He gave sharp orders to the men to close up round the carriages, and then gave the curt word of command:

"En avant!"

Marguerite could but strain her ears to listen. All her senses, all her faculties, had merged into that of hearing, rendering it doubly keen. It seemed to her that she could distinguish the faint sound—that even as she listened grew fainter and fainter yet—of Chauvelin and his squad moving away rapidly into the thickness of the wood some distance already ahead.

Close to her there was the snorting of horses, the clanging and noise of moving mounted men. Héron's coach had taken the lead; she could hear the creaking of its wheels, the calls of the driver urging his beasts.

The diminished party was moving at foot pace in the darkness that seemed to grow denser at every step, and through that silence which was so full of mysterious sounds.

The carriage rolled and rocked on its springs; Marguerite, giddy and over-tired, lay back with closed eyes, her hand resting in that of Armand. Time, space, and distance had ceased to be; only Death, the great Lord of all, had remained; he walked on ahead, scythe on skeleton shoulder, and beckoned patiently, but with a sure, grim hand.

There was another halt, the coach-wheels groaned and creaked on their axles, one or two horses reared with the sudden drawing up of the curb.

"What is it now?" came Héron's hoarse voice through the darkness.

"It is pitch-dark, citizen," was the response from ahead. "The drivers cannot see their horses' ears. They want to know if they may light their lanthorns and then lead their horses."

"They can lead their horses," replied Héron roughly, "but I'll have no lanthorns lighted. We don't know what fools may be lurking behind trees, hoping to put a bullet through my head—or yours, sergeant—we don't want to make a lighted target of ourselves—what? But let the drivers lead their horses, and one or two of you who are riding greys might dismount too and lead the way—the greys would show up perhaps in this cursed blackness."

While his orders were being carried out he called out once more:

"Are we far now from that confounded chapel?"

"We can't be far, citizen; the whole forest is not more than six leagues wide at any point, and we have gone two since we turned into it."

"Hush!" Héron's voice suddenly broke in hoarsely. "What was that? Silence, I say. Damn you—can't you hear?"

There was a hush—every ear straining to listen; but the horses were not still—they continued to champ their bits, to paw the ground, and to toss their heads, impatient to get on. Only now and again there would come a lull, even through these sounds—a second or two, mayhap, of perfect, unbroken silence—and then it seemed as if right through the darkness a mysterious echo sent back those same sounds—the champing of bits, the pawing of soft ground, the tossing and snorting of animals, human life that breathed far out there among the trees.

"It is citizen Chauvelin and his men," said the sergeant after a while, and speaking in a whisper.

"Silence—I want to hear," came the curt, hoarsely-whispered command.

Once more every one listened, the men hardly daring to breathe, clinging to their bridles and pulling on their horses' mouths, trying to keep them still, and again through the night there came like a faint echo which seemed to throw back those sounds that indicated the presence of men and of horses not very far away.

"Yes, it must be citizen Chauvelin," said Héron at last; but the tone of his voice sounded as if he were anxious and only half convinced; "but I thought he would be at the château by now."

"He may have had to go at foot pace; it is very dark, citizen Héron," remarked the sergeant.

"En avant, then," quoth the other; "the sooner we come up with him the better."

And the squad of mounted men, the two coaches, the drivers and the advance section, who were leading their horses, slowly restarted on the way. The horses snorted, the bits and stirrups clanged, and the springs and wheels of the coaches creaked and groaned dismally as the ramshackle vehicles began once more to plough the carpet of pine-needles that lay thick upon the road.

But inside the carriage Armand and Marguerite held one another tightly by the hand.

"It is de Batz—with his friends," she whispered scarce above her breath.

"De Batz?" he asked vaguely and fearfully, for in the dark he could not see her face, and as he did not understand why she should suddenly be talking of de Batz, he thought with horror that mayhap her prophecy anent herself had come true, and that her mind—wearied and overwrought—had become suddenly unhinged.

"Yes, de Batz," she replied. "Percy sent him a message, through me, to meet him—here. I am not mad, Armand," she added more calmly. "Sir Andrew took Percy's letter to de Batz the day that we started from Paris."

"Great God!" exclaimed Armand, and instinctively, with a sense of protection, he put his arms round his sister. "Then, if Chauvelin or the squad is attacked —if——"

"Yes," she said calmly; "if de Batz makes an attack on Chauvelin, or if he reaches the château first and tries to defend it, they will shoot us, Armand . . . and Percy."

"But is the Dauphin at the Château d'Ourde?"

"No, no! I think not."

"Then why should Percy have invoked the aid of de Batz? Now, when——"

"I don't know," she murmured helplessly. "Of course, when he wrote the letter he could not guess that they would hold us as hostages. He may have thought that under cover of darkness and of an unexpected attack he might have saved himself had he been alone; but now that you and I are here—— Oh! it is all so horrible, and I cannot understand it all."

"Hark!" broke in Armand, suddenly gripping her arm more tightly.

"Halt!" rang the sergeant's voice through the night.

This time there was no mistaking the sound; already it came from no far distance. It was the sound of a man running and panting, and now and again calling out as he ran.

For a moment there was stillness in the very air, the wind itself was hushed between two gusts, even the rain had ceased its incessant pattering. Héron's harsh voice was raised in the stillness.

"What is it now?" he demanded.

"A runner, citizen," replied the sergeant, "coming through the wood from the right."

"From the right?" and the exclamation was accompanied by a volley of oaths; "the direction of the château? Chauvelin has been attacked; he is sending a messenger back to me. Sergeant—sergeant, close up round that coach; guard your prisoners as you value your life, and——"

The rest of his words were drowned in a yell of such violent fury that the horses, already over-nervous and fidgety, reared in mad terror, and the men had the greatest difficulty in holding them in. For a few minutes noisy confusion prevailed, until the men could quieten their quivering animals with soft words and gentle pattings.

Then the troopers obeyed, closing up round the coach wherein brother and sister sat huddled against one another.

One of the men said under his breath:

"Ah! but the citizen agent knows how to curse! One day he will break his gullet with the fury of his oaths."

In the meanwhile the runner had come nearer, always at the same breathless speed.

The next moment he was challenged:

"Qui va là?"

"A friend!" he replied, panting and exhausted. "Where is citizen Héron?"

"Here!" came the reply in a voice hoarse with passionate excitement. "Come up, damn you. Be quick!"

"A lanthorn, citizen," suggested one of the drivers.

"No—no—not now. Here! Where the devil are we?"

"We are close to the chapel on our left, citizen," said the sergeant.

The runner, whose eyes were no doubt accustomed to the gloom, had drawn nearer to the carriage.

"The gates of the château," he said, still somewhat breathlessly, "are just opposite here on the right, citizen. I have just come through them."

"Speak up, man!" and Héron's voice now sounded as if choked with passion. "Citizen Chauvelin sent you?"

"Yes. He bade me tell you that he has gained access to the château, and that Capet is not there."

A series of citizen Héron's choicest oaths interrupted the man's speech. Then he was curtly ordered to proceed, and he resumed his report.

"Citizen Chauvelin rang at the door of the château; after a while he was admitted by an old servant, who appeared to be in charge, but the place seemed otherwise absolutely deserted—only——"

"Only what? Go on; what is it?"

"As we rode through the park it seemed to us as if we were being watched and followed. We heard distinctly the sound of horses behind and around us, but we could see nothing; and now, when I ran back, again I heard . . . There are others in the park to-night besides us, citizen."

There was silence after that. It seemed as if the flood of Héron's blasphemous eloquence had spent itself at last.

"Others in the park!" And now his voice was scarcely above a whisper, hoarse and trembling. "How many? Could you see?"

"No, citizen, we could not see; but there are horsemen lurking round the château now. Citizen Chauvelin took four men into the house with him and left the others on guard outside. He bade me tell you it might be safer to send him a few more men if you could spare them. There are a number of disused farm buildings quite close to the gates, and he suggested that all the horses be put up there for the night, and that the men come up to the château on foot; it would be quicker and safer, for the darkness is intense."

Even while the man spoke the forest in the distance seemed to wake from its solemn silence, the wind on its wings brought sounds of life and movement different from the prowling of beasts or the screeching of night-birds. It was the furtive advance of men, the quick whispers of command, of encouragement, of the human animal preparing to attack his kind. But all in the distance still, all muffled, all furtive as yet.

"Sergeant!" It was Héron's voice, but it was subdued, and almost calm now; "can you see the chapel?"

"More clearly, citizen," replied the sergeant. "It is on our left; quite a small building, I think."

"Then dismount, and walk all round it. See that there are no windows or door in the rear."

There was a prolonged silence, during which those distant sounds of men moving, of furtive preparations for attack, struck distinctly through the night.

Marguerite and Armand, clinging to one another, not knowing what to think, nor yet what to fear, heard the sounds mingling with those immediately around them, and Marguerite murmured under her breath:

"It is de Batz and some of his friends; but what can they do? What can Percy hope for now?"

But of Percy she could hear and see nothing. The darkness and the silence had drawn their impenetrable veil between his unseen presence and her own consciousness. She could see the coach in which he was, but Héron's hideous personality, his head with its battered hat and soiled bandage, had seemed to obtrude itself always before her gaze, blotting out from her mind even the knowledge that Percy was there not fifty yards away from her.

So strong did this feeling grow in her that presently the awful dread seized upon her that he was no longer there; that he was dead, worn out with fatigue and illness brought on by terrible privations, or if not dead that he had swooned, that he was unconscious—his spirit absent from his body. She remembered that frightful yell of rage and hate which Héron had uttered a few minutes ago. Had the brute vented his fury on his helpless, weakened prisoner, and stilled for ever those lips that, mayhap, had mocked him to the last?

Marguerite could not guess. She hardly knew what to hope. Vaguely, when the thought of Percy lying dead beside his enemy floated through her aching brain, she was almost unconscious of a sense of relief at the thought that at least he would be spared the pain of the final, inevitable cataclysm.

47

THE CHAPEL OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE

THE sergeant's voice broke in upon her misery.

The man had apparently done as the citizen agent had ordered, and had closely examined the little building that stood on the left—a vague, black mass more dense than the surrounding gloom.

"It is all solid stone, citizen," he said; "iron gates in front, closed but not locked, rusty key in the lock, which turns quite easily; no windows or door in the rear."

"You are quite sure?"

"Quite certain, citizen: it is plain, solid stone at the back, and the only possible access to the interior is through the iron gate in front."

"Good."

Marguerite could only just hear Héron speaking to the sergeant. Darkness enveloped every form and deadened every sound. Even the harsh voice which she had learned to loathe and to dread sounded curiously subdued and unfamiliar. Héron no longer seemed inclined to storm, to rage, or to curse. The momentary danger, the thought of failure, the hope of revenge, had apparently cooled his temper, strengthened his determination, and forced his voice down to little above a whisper. He gave his orders clearly and firmly, and the words came to Marguerite on the wings of the wind with strange distinctness, borne to her ears by the darkness itself, and the hush that lay over the wood.

"Take half a dozen men with you, sergeant," she heard him say, "and join citizen Chauvelin at the château. You can stable your horses in the farm buildings close by, as he suggests, and run to him on foot. You and your men should quickly get the best of a handful of midnight prowlers; you are well armed and they only civilians. Tell citizen Chauvelin that I in the meanwhile will take care of our prisoners. The Englishman I shall put in irons and lock up inside the chapel, with five men under the command of your corporal to guard him, the other two I will drive myself straight to Crécy with what is left of the escort. You understand?"

"Yes, citizen."

"We may not reach Crécy until two hours after midnight, but directly I arrive I will send citizen Chauvelin further reinforcements, which, however, I hope may not prove necessary, but which will reach him in the early morning. Even if he is seriously attacked, he can, with the fourteen men he will have with him, hold out inside the castle through the night. Tell him also that at dawn the two prisoners who will be with me will be shot in the courtyard of the guard-house at Crécy, but that whether he has got hold of Capet or not he had best pick up the Englishman in the chapel in the morning and bring him straight to Crécy, where I shall be awaiting him ready to return to Paris. You understand?"

"Yes, citizen."

"Then repeat what I said."

"I am to take six men with me to reinforce citizen Chauvelin now."

"Yes."

"And you, citizen, will drive straight back to Crécy, and will send us further reinforcements from there, which will reach us in the early morning."

"Yes."

"We are to hold the château against those unknown marauders if necessary until the reinforcements come from Crécy. Having routed them, we return here, pick up the Englishman whom you will have locked up in the chapel under a strong guard commanded by Corporal Cassard, and join you forthwith at Crécy."

"This, whether citizen Chauvelin has got hold of Capet or not."

"Yes, citizen, I understand," concluded the sergeant imperturbably; "and I am also to tell citizen Chauvelin that the two prisoners will be shot at dawn in the courtyard of the guard-house at Crécy."

"Yes. That is all. Try to find the leader of the attacking party, and bring him along to Crécy with the Englishman; but unless they are in very small numbers do not trouble about the others. Now en avant; citizen Chauvelin might be glad of your help. And—stay—order all the men to dismount, and take the horses out of one of the coaches, then let the men you are taking with you each lead a horse, or even two, and stable them all in the farm buildings. I shall not need them, and could not spare any of my men for the work later on. Remember that, above all, silence is the order. When you are ready to start, come back to me here."

The sergeant moved away, and Marguerite heard him transmitting the citizen agent's orders to the soldiers. The dismounting was carried on in wonderful silence—for silence had been one of the principal commands—only one or two words reached her ears.

"First section and first half of second section fall in! Right wheel! First section each take two horses on the lead. Quietly now there; don't tug at his bridle—let him go."

And after that a simple report:

"All ready, citizen!"

"Good!" was the response. "Now detail your corporal and two men to come here to me, so that we may put the Englishman in irons, and take him at once to the chapel, and four men to stand guard at the doors of the other coach."

The necessary orders were given, and after that there came the curt command:

"En avant!"

The sergeant, with his squad and all the horses, was slowly moving away in the night. The horses' hoofs hardly made a noise on the soft carpet of pine-needless and of dead fallen leaves, but the champing of the bits was of course audible, and now and then the snorting of some poor, tired horse longing for his stable.

Somehow in Marguerite's fevered mind this departure of a squad of men seemed like the final flitting of her last hope; the slow agony of the familiar sounds, the retreating horses and soldiers moving away amongst the shadows, took on a weird significance. Héron had given his last orders. Percy, helpless and probably unconscious, would spend the night in that dank chapel, while she and Armand would be taken back to Crécy, driven to death like some insentient animals to the slaughter.

When the grey dawn would first begin to peep through the branches of the pines Percy would be led back to Paris and the guillotine, and she and Armand will have been sacrificed to the hatred and revenge of brutes.

The end had come, and there was nothing more to be done. Struggling, fighting, scheming, could be of no avail now; but she wanted to get to her husband; she wanted to be near him now that death was so imminent both for him and for her.

She tried to envisage it all, quite calmly, just as she knew that Percy would wish her to do. The inevitable end was there, and she would not give to these callous wretches here the gratuitous spectacle of a despairing woman fighting blindly against an adverse Fate.

But she wanted to go to her husband. She felt that she could face death more easily on the morrow if she could but see him once, if she could look once more into the eyes that had mirrored so much enthusiasm, such absolute vitality and whole-hearted self-sacrifice, and such an intensity of love and passion; if she could but kiss once more those lips that had smiled through life, and would smile, she knew, even in the face of death.

She tried to open the carriage door, but it was held from without, and a harsh voice cursed her, ordering her to sit still.

But she could lean out of the window and strain her eyes to see. They were by now accustomed to the gloom, the dilated pupils taking in pictures of vague forms moving like ghouls in the shadows. The other coach was not far, and she could hear Héron's voice, still subdued and calm, and the curses of the men. But not a sound from Percy.

"I think the prisoner is unconscious," she heard one of the men say.

"Lift him out of the carriage, then," was Héron's curt command; "and you go and throw open the chapel gates."

Marguerite saw it all. The movement, the crowd of men, two vague, black forms lifting another one, which appeared heavy and inert, out of the coach, and carrying it staggering up towards the chapel.

Then the forms disappeared, swallowed up by the more dense mass of the little building, merged in with it, immovable as the stone itself.

Only a few words reached her now.

"He is unconscious."

"Leave him there, then; he'll not move."

"Now close the gates!"

There was a loud clang, and Marguerite gave a piercing scream. She tore at the handle of the carriage door.

"Armand, Armand, go to him!" she cried; and all her self-control, all her enforced calm, vanished in an outburst of wild, agonizing passion. "Let me get to him, Armand! This is the end; get me to him, in the name of God!"

"Stop that woman screaming," came Héron's voice clearly through the night. "Put her and the other prisoner in irons—quick!"

But while Marguerite expended her feeble strength in a mad, pathetic effort to reach her husband, even now at this last hour, when all hope was dead and Death was so nigh, Armand had already wrenched the carriage door from the grasp of the soldier who was guarding it. He was of the South, and knew the trick of charging an unsuspecting adversary with head thrust forward like a bull inside a ring. Thus he knocked one of the soldiers down and made a quick rush for the chapel gates.

The men, attacked so suddenly and in such complete darkness, did not wait for orders. They closed in round Armand; one man drew his sabre and hacked away with it in aimless rage.

But for the moment he evaded them all, pushing his way through them, not heeding the blows that came on him out of the darkness. At last he reached the chapel.

With one bound he was at the gate, his numb fingers fumbling for the lock, which he could not see.

It was a vigorous blow from Héron's fist that brought him at last to his knees, and even then his hands did not relax their hold; they gripped the ornamental scroll of the gate, shook the gate itself in its rusty hinges, pushed and pulled with the unreasoning strength of despair. He had a sabre cut across his brow, and the blood flowed in a warm, trickling stream down his face. But of this he was unconscious; all that he wanted, all that he was striving for with agonizing heart-beats and cracking sinews, was to get to his friend, who was lying in there unconscious, abandoned—dead, perhaps.

"Curse you," struck Héron's voice close to his ear. "Cannot some of you stop this raving maniac?"

Then it was that the heavy blow on his head caused him a sensation of sickness, and he fell on his knees, still gripping the ironwork.

Stronger hands than his were forcing him to loosen his hold; blows that hurt terribly rained on his numbed fingers; he felt himself dragged away, carried like an inert mass further and further from that gate which he would have given his life-blood to force open.

And Marguerite heard all this from the inside of the coach, where she was imprisoned as effectually as was Percy's unconscious body inside that dark chapel. She could hear the noise and scramble, and Héron's hoarse commands, the swift sabre strokes as they cut through the air.

Already a trooper had clapped irons on her wrists, two others held the carriage doors. Now Armand was lifted back into the coach, and she could not even help to make him comfortable, though as he was lifted in she heard him feebly moaning. Then the carriage doors were banged again.

"Do not allow either of the prisoners out again, on peril of your lives!" came with a vigorous curse from Héron.

After which there was a moment's silence; whispered commands came spasmodically in deadened sounds to her ear.

"Will the key turn?"

"Yes, citizen."

"All secure?"

"Yes, citizen. The prisoner is groaning."

"Let him groan."

"The empty coach, citizen? The horses have been taken out."

"Leave it standing where it is, then; citizen Chauvelin will need it in the morning."

"Armand," whispered Marguerite inside the coach, "did you see Percy?"

"It was so dark," murmured Armand feebly; "but I saw him, just inside the gates, where they had laid him down. I heard him groaning. Oh, my God!"

"Hush, dear!" she said. "We can do nothing more, only die as he lived, bravely and with a smile on our lips, in memory of him."

"Number 35 is wounded, citizen," said one of the men.

"Curse the fool who did the mischief," was the placid response. "Leave him here with the guard."

"How many of you are there left then?" asked the same voice a moment later.

"Only two, citizen; if one whole section remains with me at the chapel door, and also the wounded man."

"Two are enough for me, and five are not too many at the chapel door." And Héron's coarse, cruel laugh echoed against the stone walls of the little chapel. "Now then, one of you get into the coach, and the other go to the horses' heads; and remember, Corporal Cassard, that you and your men who stay here to guard that chapel door are answerable to the whole nation with your lives for the safety of the Englishman."

The carriage door was thrown open, and a soldier stepped in and sat down opposite Marguerite and Armand. Héron in the meanwhile was apparently scrambling up the box. Marguerite could hear him muttering curses as he groped for the reins and finally gathered them into his hand.

The springs of the coach creaked and groaned as the vehicle slowly swung round; the wheels ploughed deeply through the soft carpet of dead leaves.

Marguerite felt Armand's inert body leaning heavily against her shoulder.

"Are you in pain, dear?" she asked softly.

He made no reply, and she thought that he had fainted. It was better so; at least the next dreary hours would flit by for him in the blissful state of unconsciousness. Now at last the heavy carriage began to move more evenly. The soldier at the horses' heads was stepping along at a rapid pace.

Marguerite would have given much even now to look back once more at the dense black mass—blacker and denser than any shadow that had ever descended before on God's earth—which held between its cold, cruel walls all that she loved in the world.

But her wrists were fettered by the irons, which cut into her flesh when she moved. She could no longer lean out of the window, and she could not even hear. The whole forest was hushed, the wind was lulled to rest; wild beasts and night-birds were silent and still. And the wheels of the coach creaked in the ruts, bearing Marguerite with every turn further and further away from the man who lay helpless in the chapel of the Holy Sepulchre.

48

THE WANING MOON

ARMAND had wakened from his attack of faintness, and brother and sister sat close to one another, shoulder touching shoulder. That sense of nearness was the one tiny spark of comfort to both of them on this dreary, dreary way.

The coach had lumbered on unceasingly since all eternity—so it seemed to them both. Once there had been a brief halt, when Héron's rough voice had ordered the soldier at the horses' heads to climb on the box beside him, and once—it had been a very little while ago—a terrible cry of pain and terror had rung through the stillness of the night. Immediately after that the horses had been put at a more rapid pace, but it had seemed to Marguerite as if that one cry of pain had been repeated by several others, which sounded more feeble, and soon appeared to be dying away in the distance behind.

The soldier who sat opposite to them must have heard the cry too, for he jumped up, as if awakened from sleep, and put his head out of the window.

"Did you hear that cry, citizen?" he asked.

But only a curse answered him, and a peremptory command not to lose sight of the prisoners by poking his head out of the window.

"Did you hear the cry?" asked the soldier of Marguerite, as he made haste to obey.

"Yes! What could it be?" she murmured.

"It seems dangerous to drive so fast in this darkness," muttered the soldier.

After which remark he, with the stolidity peculiar to his kind, figuratively shrugged his shoulders, detaching himself, as it were, of the whole affair.

"We should be out of the forest by now," he remarked in an undertone a little while later; "the way seemed shorter before."

Just then the coach gave an unexpected lurch to one side, and after much groaning and creaking of axles and springs it came to a standstill, and the citizen agent was heard cursing loudly and then scrambling down from the box.

The next moment the carriage-door was pulled open from without, and the harsh voice called out peremptorily:

"Citizen soldier, here—quick!—quick!—curse you!—we'll have one of the horses down if you don't hurry!"

The soldier struggled to his feet; it was never good to be slow in obeying the citizen agent's commands. He was half asleep, and no doubt numb with cold and long sitting still; to accelerate his movements he was suddenly gripped by the arm and dragged incontinently out of the coach.

Then the door was slammed to again, either by a rough hand or a sudden gust of wind, Marguerite could not tell; she heard a cry of rage and one of terror, and Héron's raucous curses. She cowered in the corner of the carriage with Armand's head against her shoulder, and tried to close her ears to all those hideous sounds.

Then suddenly all the sounds were hushed and all around everything became perfectly calm and still—so still that at first the silence oppressed her with a vague, nameless dread. It was as if Nature herself had paused, that she might listen; and the silence became more and more absolute, until Marguerite could hear Armand's soft, regular breathing close to her ear.

The window nearest to her was open, and as she leaned forward with that paralysing sense of oppression a breath of pure air struck full upon her nostrils and brought with it a briny taste as if from the sea.

It was not quite so dark; and there was a sense as of open country stretching out to the limits of the horizon. Overhead a vague greyish light suffused the sky, and the wind swept the clouds in great rolling banks right across that light.

Marguerite gazed upward with a more calm feeling that was akin to gratitude. That pale light, though so wan and feeble, was thrice welcome after that inky blackness wherein shadows were less dark than the lights. She watched eagerly the bank of clouds driven by the dying gale.

The light grew brighter and faintly golden, now the banks of clouds—storm-tossed and fleecy—raced past one another, parted and reunited like veils of unseen giant dancers waved by hands that controlled infinite space—advanced and rushed and slackened speed again—united and finally tore asunder to reveal the waning moon, honey-coloured and mysterious, rising as if from an invisible ocean far away.

The wan pale light spread over the wide stretch of country, throwing over it as it spread dull tones of indigo and of blue. Here and there sparse, stunted trees with fringed gaunt arms bending to prevailing winds proclaimed the neighbourhood of the sea.

Marguerite gazed on the picture which the waning moon had so suddenly revealed; but she gazed with eyes that knew not what they saw. The moon had risen on her right—there lay the east—and the coach must have been travelling due north, whereas Crécy. . . .

In the absolute silence that reigned she could perceive from far, very far away, the sound of a church clock striking the midnight hour; and now it seemed to her super-sensitive senses that a firm footstep was treading the soft earth, a footstep that drew nearer—and then nearer still.

Nature did pause to listen. The wind was hushed, the night-birds in the forest had gone to rest. Marguerite's heart beat so fast that its throbbings choked her, and a dizziness clouded her consciousness.

But through this state of torpor she heard the opening of the carriage door, she felt the onrush of that pure, briny air, and she felt a long, burning kiss upon her hands.

She thought then that she was really dead, and that God in His infinite love had opened to her the outer gates of Paradise.

"My love!" she murmured.

She was leaning back in the carriage and her eyes were closed, but she felt that firm fingers removed the irons from her wrists, and that a pair of warm lips were pressed there in their stead.

"There, little woman, that's better so—is it not? Now let me get hold of poor old Armand!"

It was Heaven, of course, else how could earth hold such heavenly joy?

"Percy!" exclaimed Armand in an awed voice.

"Hush, dear!" murmured Marguerite feebly; "we are in Heaven, you and I——"

Whereupon a ringing laugh woke the echoes of the silent night.

"In Heaven, dear heart!" And the voice had a delicious earthly ring in its whole-hearted merriment.

"Please God, you'll both be at Portel with me before dawn."

Then she was indeed forced to believe. She put out her hands and groped for him, for it was dark inside the carriage; she groped, and felt his massive shoulders leaning across the body of the coach, while his fingers busied themselves with the irons on Armand's wrist.

"Don't touch that brute's filthy coat with your dainty fingers, dear heart," he said gaily. "Great Lord! I have worn that wretch's clothes for over two hours; I feel as if the dirt had penetrated to my bones."

Then, with that gesture so habitual to him, he took her head between his two hands, and drawing her to him until the wan light from without lit up the face that he worshipped, he gazed his fill into her eyes.

She could only see the outline of his head silhouetted against the wind-tossed sky; she could not see his eyes, nor his lips, but she felt his nearness, and the happiness of that almost caused her to swoon.

"Come out into the open, my lady fair," he murmured, and though she could not see, she could feel that he smiled; "let God's pure air blow through your hair and round your dear head. Then, if you can walk so far, there's a small half-way house close by here. I have knocked up the none too amiable host. You and Armand could have half an hour's rest there before we go further on our way."

"But you, Percy?—are you safe?"

"Yes, m'dear, we are all of us safe until morning—time enough to reach Le Portel, and to be aboard the *Day Dream* before mine amiable friend, M. Chambertin, has discovered his worthy colleague lying gagged and bound inside the Chapel of the Holy Sepulchre. By Gad! how old Héron will curse—the moment he can open his mouth!"

He half helped, half lifted her out of the carriage. The strong pure air suddenly rushing right through to her lungs made her feel faint, and she almost fell. But it was good to feel herself falling, when one pair of arms amongst the millions on the earth were there to receive her.

"Can you walk, dear heart?" he asked. "Lean well on me—it is not far, and the rest will do you good."

"But you, Percy——"

He laughed, and the most complete joy of living seemed to resound through that laugh. Her arm was in his, and for one moment he stood still while his eyes swept the far reaches of the country, the mellow distance still wrapped in its mantle of indigo, still untouched by the mysterious light of the waning moon.

He pressed her arm against his heart, but his right hand was stretched out towards the black wall of the forest behind him, towards the dark crests of the pines in which the dying wind sent its last mournful sighs.

"Dear heart," he said, and his voice quivered with the intensity of his excitement, "beyond the stretch of that wood, far from away over there, there are cries and moans of anguish that come to my ear even now. But for you, dear, I would cross that wood to-night and re-enter Paris to-morrow. But for you, dear—but for you," he reiterated earnestly as he pressed her closer to him, for a bitter cry had risen to her lips.

She went on in silence. Her happiness was great

—as great as was her pain. She had found him again, the man whom she worshipped, the husband whom she thought never to see again on earth. She had found him, and not even now—not after those terrible weeks of misery and suffering unspeakable—could she feel that love had triumphed over the wild, adventurous spirit, the reckless enthusiasm, the ardour of self-sacrifice.

49

THE LAND OF ELDORADO

It seems that in the pocket of Héron's coat there was a letter-case with some few hundred francs. It was amusing to think that the brute's money helped to bribe the ill-tempered keeper of the half-way house to receive guests at midnight, and to ply them well with food, drink, and the shelter of a stuffy coffee-room.

Marguerite sat silently beside her husband, her hand in his. Armand, opposite to them, had both elbows on the table. He looked pale and wan, with a bandage across his forehead, and his glowing eyes were resting on his chief.

"Yes! you demmed young idiot," said Blakeney merrily, "you nearly upset my plan in the end, with your yelling and screaming outside the chapel gates."

"I wanted to get to you, Percy. I thought those brutes had got you there inside that building."

"Not they!" he exclaimed. "It was my friend Héron whom they had trussed and gagged, and whom my amiable friend M. Chambertin will find in there to-morrow morning. By Gad! I would go back if only for the pleasure of hearing Héron curse when first the gag is taken from his mouth."

"But how was it all done, Percy? And there was de Batz——"

"De Batz was part of the scheme I had planned for mine own escape before I knew that those brutes meant to take Marguerite and you as hostages for my good behaviour. What I hoped then was that under cover of a tussle or a fight I could somehow or other contrive to slip through their fingers. It was a chance, and you know my belief in bald-headed Fortune, with the one solitary hair. Well, I meant to grab that hair; and at the worst I could but die in the open and not caged in that awful hole like some noxious vermin. I knew that de Batz would rise to the bait. I told him in my letter that the Dauphin would be at the Château d'Ourde this night, but that I feared the Revolutionary Government had got wind of this fact, and were sending an armed escort to bring the lad away. This letter Ffoulkes took to him; I knew that he would make a vigorous effort to get the Dauphin into his hands, and that during the scuffle that one hair on Fortune's head would for one second only, mayhap, come within my reach. I had so planned the expedition that we were bound to arrive at the forest of Boulogne by nightfall, and night is always a useful ally. But at the guard-house of the Rue Ste. Anne I realized for the first time that those brutes had pressed me into a tighter corner than I had preconceived."

He paused, and once again that look of recklessness swept over his face, and his eyes, still hollow and circled, shone with the excitement of past memories.

"I was such a weak, miserable wretch then," he said, in answer to Marguerite's appeal. "I had to try and build up some strength, when—Heaven forgive me for the sacrilege—I had unwittingly risked your precious life, dear heart, in that blind endeavour to save mine own. By Gad! it was no easy task in that jolting vehicle with that noisome wretch beside me for sole company: yet I ate and drank and I slept for three days and two nights, until the hour when in the darkness I struck Héron from behind, half-strangled him first, then gagged him, and finally slipped into his filthy coat and put that loathsome bandage across my head, and his battered hat above it all. The yell he gave when I first attacked him made every horse rear—you must remember it—the noise effectually drowned our last scuffle in the coach. Chauvelin was the only man who might have suspected what had occurred, but he had gone on ahead, and bald-headed Fortune had passed by me, and I had managed to grab its one hair. After that it was all quite easy. The sergeant and the soldiers had seen very little of Héron and nothing of me; it did not take a great effort to deceive them, and the darkness of the night was my most faithful friend. His raucous voice was not difficult to imitate, and darkness always muffles and changes every tone. Anyway, it was not likely that those loutish soldiers would even remotely suspect the trick that was being played on them. The citizen agent's orders were promptly and implicitly obeyed. The men never even thought to wonder that after insisting on an escort of twenty he should drive off with two prisoners and only two men to guard them. If they did wonder, it was not theirs to question. Those two troopers are spending an uncomfortable night somewhere in the forest of Boulogne, each tied to a tree, and some two leagues apart one from the other. And now," he added gaily, "en voiture, my fair lady; and you, too, Armand. 'Tis seven leagues to Le Portel, and we must be there before dawn."

"Sir Andrew's intention was to make for Calais first, there to open communication with the *Day Dream* and then for Le Portel," said Marguerite; "after that he meant to strike back for the Château d'Ourde in search of me."

"Then we'll still find him at Le Portel—I shall know how to lay hands on him; but you two must get aboard the *Day Dream* at once, for Ffoulkes and I can always look after ourselves."

It was one hour after midnight when—refreshed with food and rest—Marguerite, Armand and Sir Percy left the half-way house. Marguerite was standing in the doorway ready to go. Percy and Armand had gone ahead to bring the coach along.

"Percy," whispered Armand, "Marguerite does not know?"

"Of course she does not, you young fool," retorted Percy lightly. "If you try and tell her I think I would smash your head."

"But you——" said the young man with sudden vehemence; "can you bear the sight of me? My God! when I think——"

"Don't think, my good Armand—not of that, anyway. Only think of the woman for whose sake you committed a crime—if she is pure and good woo her and win her—not just now, for it were foolish to go back to Paris after her, but anon, when she comes to England and all these past days are forgotten—then love her as much as you can, Armand. Learn your lesson of love better than I have learnt mine; do not cause Jeanne Lange those tears of anguish which my mad spirit brings to your sister's eyes.

You were right, Armand, when you said that I do not know how to love!"

But on board the *Day Dream*, when all danger was past, Marguerite felt that he did.

FOURTH NOVEL

"THAT DEMMED, ELUSIVE PIMPERNEL"

1

SIR PERCY HITS BACK

On the spot where the Hotel Moderne now rears its more ambitious head, there stood at that time a cottage with sloping red-tiled roof and white-washed walls. It was owned by one Baptiste Portal, an old peasant of the Dauphiné, who dispensed refreshments to travellers and passers-by, as his father and grandfather had done before him, in the shape of somewhat thin *vin du pays* and an occasional glass of *eau-de-vie*, while he spent his slack time chiefly in grumbling at the fact that the new posting-inn on the high-road had taken all his trade away. He did not see the necessity of the posting-inn, did not old Baptiste, nor for a matter of that of the high-road or the post-chaise. Before all these new notions had come into the heads of the government people up in Paris, travellers had been content to come squelching through the mud on the back of a good horse, or come ploughing through inches of dust in the old *coche*. So why not now? And was not the old wine of Les Amandiers as good and better than the vinegar dispensed at the more pretentious posting-inn? The place was called Les Amandiers because at the back of the house there were two anæmic almond-trees with gaunt, twisted arms which covered themselves in the spring with sickly blooms, and in the summer with dust. In front of the house, up against the white-washed wall, there was a wooden bench on which Baptiste's privileged customers were wont to sit on fine evenings, to drink their *vin du pays* and join the old man in his wholesale condemnation of the government "up in Paris" and its new-fangled ways. From this vantage-point a glorious view was obtained over the valley of the Buëche, and beyond Laragne as far as the peaks of Pelvoux: whilst to the right towered in the distance the grand old citadel of Sisteron with its turrets and fortifications dating from the fourteenth century, and the stately church of Notre Dame. But views and winding rivers, snowy peaks and mediæval fortresses did not interest Baptiste Portal's customers nearly as much as the price of almonds or the alarming increase in the cost of living.

Now on this particular afternoon in May the mistral was blowing mercilessly across the valley from over the snows of Pelvoux, and the cold and the dust had driven all the good Portal's customers indoors. The low-raftered room, decorated with strings of onions which hung from the ceiling together with a bunch or two of garlic, of basil and other pot-herbs, and perfumed also with the aroma of the *pot-au-feu* simmering in the kitchen, had acquired just that right atmosphere, cosy, warm and odorous, beloved of every true man born in Dauphiné. It was a memorable afternoon, remembered long afterwards and retold by the gossips of Sisteron and Laragne in all its dramatic details. But at this hour, nothing more dramatic had occurred than the arrival of a detachment of soldiers, under the command of an under-officer, who had come up from Orange, so they said, in order to fetch away the young men who were wanted for the army. They had demanded supper and shelter for the night.

Of course soldiers, as soldiers, were very much disapproved of by those worthies of Sisteron who frequented Les Amandiers, more especially now when what they did was to fetch away the young men for cannon-fodder, to fight the English and prolong this awful war which caused food to be so dear and hands for harvesting so scarce. But on the other hand, soldiers as company were welcome. They brought news of the outside world, most of it bad, it is true—nothing good did happen anywhere these days—but news nevertheless. And though at the recital of what went on in Paris, in Lyons or even as near as Orange, the guillotine, the tumbrils, the wholesale slaughter of tyrants and aristos, one shuddered with horror and apprehension, there were always the lively tales of barrack-life to follow, the laughter, the ribald song, and something of life seemed to filtrate into this sleepy half-dead corner of old Dauphiné.

The soldiers—there were a score of them—occupied the best place in the room, as was only fitting; they sat, squeezed tightly against one another like dried figs in a box, on the two benches on either side of the centre trestle-table. Old Baptiste Portal sat with them beside the officer. Some kind of lieutenant this man appeared to be, or other subaltern; but oh dear me! these days one could hardly tell an officer from the rag-tag and bobtail of the army, save for the fact that he wore epaulettes. Now this man—but there! what was the use of comparing these ruffians with the splendid officers of the King's armies in the past?

This one certainly was not proud. He sat with his men, joked, drank with them, and presently he convened friend Portal to a glass of wine: "À la santé," he added, "de la République, and of Citizen Robespierre, the great and incorruptible master of France!"

Baptiste, wagging his old head, had not liked to refuse, because soldiers were soldiers and these had been at great pains to explain to him that the reason why the guillotine was kept so busy was because Frenchmen had not yet learned to be good Republicans.

"We've cut off the head of Louis Capet and of the widow Capet too," the officer had added with grim significance, "but there are still Frenchmen who are bad patriots and hanker after the return of the tyrants."

Now Baptiste, like all his like in the Dauphiné, had learned in childhood to worship God and honour the King. The crime of regicide appeared to him unforgivable, like that mysterious sin against the Holy Ghost, which M. le Curé used vaguely to hint at, and which no one understood. In addition to that Baptiste greatly resented His late Majesty King Louis XVI. and his august Queen being irreverently referred to as Louis Capet and the widow Capet. But he kept his own counsel and silently drank his wine. What his thoughts were at the moment was nobody's business.

After that, talk drifted to the neighbourhood: the aristos who still clung to the land which by right belonged to the people. Neither Baptiste nor his customers—old peasants from the district—were a match for the lieutenant and his corporals in such discussions. They did not dare argue, only shook their heads and sighed at the coarse jests which the soldiers uttered against people and families whom every one in the Dauphiné knew and esteemed.

The Frontenacs for instance.

The talk and the jests had turned on the Frontenacs: people who had owned the land for as long as the oldest inhabitant could remember and God only knows how long before that. Well! it appeared that in the eyes of these soldiers of the Republic the Frontenacs were bad patriots, tyrants and traitors. Didn't Citizen Portal know that?

No! Portal did not—he had never been called "citizen" before, and didn't like it: he was just Baptiste to those who knew him, quoi?—Nor would he admit that the Frontenacs were traitors. There was Monsieur, who knew more about cattle and almonds than any man for leagues around. How could he be a bad patriot? And Madame, who was very good and pious, and Mademoiselle who was so ill and delicate. But on this there followed an altercation—stern rebuke of Baptiste from the officer for talking of "Monsieur," of "Madame" and "Mademoiselle." Bah! there were no aristos left these days. "Aren't we all citizens of France?" the lieutenant concluded grandiloquently.

Silence and submission on the part of all the groundlings which followed on the lieutenant's rebuke, somewhat mollified the latter's aggressive patriotism. He condescended to relate how he had been deputed to make a perquisition in the house of the Frontenacs, and if anything was found the least compromising, then the devil help the whole brood: their lives would not be worth an hour's purchase. In fact, in the lieutenant's opinion—and who better qualified to hold one?—the Frontenacs were already judged, condemned, and as good as guillotined. He held with the "law of the suspect," lately enacted by the National Assembly, did Lieutenant Godet.

Again much wagging of heads! "The Committees in all Sections," Godet now goes on airily, and proceeds to pick his teeth after that excellently-stewed scrag-end of mutton, "the Committees in all Sections are ordered in future to arrest all persons who are suspect."

No one knows what is a Committee, nor yet a Section: but they are evidently fearsome things. But no matter about them: the thing is who are the "suspect" who are thus arrestable?

"The Frontenacs are suspect," the lieutenant explains whilst sucking his tooth-pick, "and so are all persons who by their actions—or—their writings have become—er—suspect."

Not very illuminating perhaps, but distinctly productive of awe. The worthies of Sisteron, those who are privileged to sit close to the centre table and actually to put in a word with the soldiers, sip their wine in silence. Just below the tiny window at the end of the room two charcoal-burners, or wood-cutters—I know not what they are—are lending an attentive ear. They dare not join in the conversation because they are comparative strangers, vagabonds really, come to pick up a few sous by doing menial work too lowering for a local peasant to do. One of them is small and slender, but looks vigorous; the other, much older, with stooping shoulders, and grey, lank hair that falls over a wrinkled forehead. He is harassed by a constant, tearing cough which he strives in vain to suppress out of respect for the company.

"But," the worthy Portal puts in tentatively, "how does one know Monsieur le—I mean citizen officer, that a person is in verity suspect?"

The lieutenant explains with a sweeping gesture of the tooth-pick: "If you are a good patriot, Citizen Portal, you are able to recognize a Suspect in the street, you can seize him by the collar then and there, and you may drag him off before the Committee, who will promptly clap him in prison. And remember," he added significantly, "that there are forty-four thousand Committees in France to-day."

"Forty-four thousand?" somebody exclaims.

"And twenty-three," Godet replies, gloating over his knowledge of this trifling detail.

"Forty-four thousand and twenty-three," he reiterates and claps the table with the palm of his hand.

"One in Sisteron?" some one murmurs.

"Three!" the lieutenant replies.

"And the Frontenacs are suspect, you say?"

"I shall know that to-morrow," rejoins the other, "and so will you."

The way he said those three last words caused every one to shudder. Over at the far end of the room, the charcoal-burner, or whatever he was, had a tearing fit of coughing.

"'Tis little Fleurette who will weep her eyes out," good old Baptiste said with a doleful shake of the head, "if anything happens to Mad— to the citizens up at the château."

"Fleurette?" the lieutenant asked.

"She is Armand's daughter—Citizen Armand you know—why——?"

He might well stare, for the officer, for some unaccountable reason, had burst into a loud guffaw.

"Citizen Armand's daughter did you say?" he queried at last, his eyes still streaming with the effort of laughing.

"Yes, of course. As pretty a wench as you can see in Dauphiné. Why shouldn't Armand have a daughter, I'd like to know."

"Do tigers have daughters?" the lieutenant retorted significantly.

Somehow the conversation languished after that.

The fate which so obviously awaited the Frontenacs, who were known and loved, cast a gloom over the most buoyant spirits. Not even the salacious stories of barrack-life, on which the men now embarked with much gusto, found responsive laughter.

It was getting late too. Past eight o'clock, and tallow was dear these days. There was a cart-shed at the back of the house, with plenty of clean straw: some of the soldiers declared themselves ready for a stretch there: even the voluble officer was yawning. The regular customers of Les Amandiers took the hint. They emptied their mugs, paid over their sous, and trooped out one by one.

The wind had gone down. There was not a cloud in the sky, which was a deep, an intense sapphire blue, studded with stars. The waning moon was not yet up, and the atmosphere was redolent of the perfume of almond-blossom. Altogether a lovely night. Nature in her kindest, most gentle mood. Spring in the air and life stirring in the entrails of the earth in travail. Some of the soldiers made their way to the shed, whilst others stretched out on the floor, or the benches of the room, there to dream perhaps of the perquisition to be made to-morrow and of the tragedy which would enter like a sudden devastating gust of wind into the peaceful home of the Frontenacs.

Nature was kind and gentle: and men were cruel and evil and vengeful. The Law of the Suspect! No more cruel, more tyrannical law was ever enacted within the memory of civilization. Forty-four thousand and twenty-three Committees to mow down the flower of the children of France. A harvest of innocents! And lest the harvesters prove slack, the National Convention has just decreed that a perambulating army shall march up and down the country, to ferret out the Suspect and to feed the guillotine. Lest the harvesters prove slack, men like Lieutenant Godet with a score of out-at-elbows, down-at-heels brigands, are ordered to scour the country, to seize and strike. To feed the guillotine in fact, and to purge the Soil of Liberty.

Is this not the most glorious revolution the world has ever known? Is it not the era of Liberty and of the Brotherhood of Man?

2

SIR PERCY HITS BACK

The perambulating army had now gone to rest: some in the cart-shed, some along the benches and tables or floor of the inn. The lieutenant in a bed. Is he not the officer commanding this score of ardent patriots? Therefore must he lie in a bed—old Portal's bed—whilst old Portal himself and his wife, older and more decrepit than he, can lie on the floor, or in the dog's kennel for aught Lieutenant Godet cares.

The two wood-cutters—or shall we call them charcoal-burners?—were among the last to leave. They had petitioned for work among the worthies here present: but money was very scarce these days and each man did what work he could for himself, and did not pay another to do it for him. But Papa Tronchet, who was a carpenter by trade and owned a little bit of woodland just by the bridge, close to Armand's cottage, he promised one of the men—not both—a couple of hours' work to-morrow: wood-cutting at the rate of two sous an hour, and then he thought it dear.

And so the company had dispersed: each man to his home. The two vagabonds—wood-cutters or charcoal-burners, they were anyhow vagabonds—found their way into the town. Wearily they trudged, for one of them was very old and the other lame, till they reached a narrow lane at right angles to the river-bank. The lane was made up of stone houses that had overhanging eaves, between which the sun could never penetrate. It was invariably either as damp as the bottom of a well, or as dry and wind-swept as an iron stove-pipe. To-night it was dry and hot: broken-down shutters, innocent of paint, creaked upon rusty hinges. A smell of boiled cabbage, of stale water and garlic hung beneath the eaves; it came in great gusts down pitch-dark stairways, under narrow doors, oozing with sticky moisture.

The two vagabonds turned into one of these doors and by instinct seemingly, for it was pitch dark, they mounted the stone stairs that squelched with grease and dirt underneath their feet. They did not speak a word until they came to the top of the house, when one of them with a kick of his boot threw open a door; it groaned and creaked under the blow. It gave on an attic-room with sloping ceiling, black with the dirt of ages, and with dormer window masked by a tattered rag that had once been a curtain. There was a wooden table in the centre of the room, and three chairs, with broken backs and ragged rush-seats, dotted about. On the table a couple of tallow candles guttered in pewter sconces.

One of the chairs was drawn close up to the table and on it sat a young man dressed in a well-worn travelling-coat with heavy boots on his feet, and a shabby tricorne hat on the top of his head. His arms were stretched out over the table and his face was buried in them. He had obviously been asleep when the door was so unceremoniously thrown open. At the sound he raised his head and blinked drowsily in the dim light at the new-comers.

Then he stretched out his arms, yawned and gave himself a shake like a sleepy dog, and finally exclaimed in English: "Ah! at last!"

One of the vagabonds—the one namely who at Les Amandiers had appeared with bent shoulders and a hacking cough, now straightened out what proved to be a magnificent athletic figure, and gave a pleasant laugh.

"Tony, you lazy dog!" he said, "I've a mind to throw you downstairs. What say you, Ffoulkes? While you and I have been breaking our backs and poisoning our lungs with the scent of garlic, I verily believe that this villain Tony has been fast asleep."

"By all means let's throw him downstairs," assented the second vagabond, now no longer lame, whom his friend had addressed as Ffoulkes.

"What would you have me do but sleep?" Tony broke in with a laugh. "I was told to wait, and so I waited. I'd far rather have been with you."

"No, you wouldn't," Ffoulkes demurred, "for then you would have been dirtier than I, and almost as filthy as Blakeney. Look at him; did you ever see such a disgusting object?"

"By Gad!" rejoined Blakeney surveying his own slender hands coated with coal-dust, grease and grime, "I don't know when I have been quite so dirty. Soap and water!" he commanded with a lofty gesture, "or I perish."

But Tony gave a rueful shrug.

"I have a bit of soap in my pocket," he said, and diving into the capacious pocket of his coat he produced an infinitesimal remnant of soap which he threw upon the table. "As for water, I can't offer you any. The only tap in the house is in the back kitchen which Madame, our worthy landlady, has locked up for the night. She won't have anything wasted, she tells me, not even water."

"Fine, thrifty people, your Dauphinois," commented Blakeney, wisely shaking his head. "But did you try bribery?"

"Yes! But Madame—I beg your pardon, Citizeness Marlot—immediately called me a cursed aristo, and threatened me with some committee or other. I couldn't argue with her, she reeked of garlic."

"And you, Tony, are an arrant coward," Blakeney rejoined, "where garlic is concerned."

"I am," Tony was willing to admit. "That's why I am so terrified of you both at this moment."

They all laughed, and since water was not obtainable, Sir Percy Blakeney, one of the most exquisite dandies of his time, and his friend Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, sat down on rickety chairs, in clothes sticky with dirt, their faces and hands masked by a thick coating of grime. Down the four walls of the small, attic-room fillets of greasy moisture trickled and mingled with the filth that lay in cakes upon the floor.

"I can't bear to look at Tony," Blakeney said with a mock sigh, "he is too demned clean."

"We'll soon remedy that," was Ffoulkes's dry comment.

And behold Sir Andrew Ffoulkes at close grips with Lord Antony Dewhurst, and this in silence for fear of disturbing the rest of the house, and bringing attention on themselves. It was a sparring match in the best style, Blakeney acting as referee, its object—to transfer some of the grime that coated the clothes and hands of Sir Andrew on to the immaculate Lord

Tony. They were only boys after all, these men, who even now were risking their lives in order to rescue the innocent from the clutches of a bloody tyranny. They were boys in their love of adventure, and in their hero worship, and men in the light-hearted way in which they were prepared for the supreme sacrifice, should luck turn against them.

The sparring match ended in a call for mercy on the part of Lord Tony. His face was plastered with grime, his hands as dirty as those of his friends.

"Tony," Blakeney said finally when he called a halt, "if her ladyship were to see you now she would divorce you."

Vent having been given to unconquerable animal spirits, there was a quick return to the serious business of the day.

"What is the latest?" Lord Tony asked.

"Just this," Sir Percy replied: "That those hell-hounds have sent out detachments of soldiers all over the country to ferret out what they are pleased to call treason. We all know what that means. Since their iniquitous 'Law of the Suspect,' no man, woman or child is safe from denunciation: now with this perambulating army, summary arrests occur by the thousand. It seems that at any moment any of those brigands can seize you by the coat-collar and drag you before one of their precious committees, who promptly sends you to the nearest guillotine."

"And you came across a detachment of those brigands, I suppose."

"We have; Ffoulkes and I spent a couple of hours in their company, in the midst of fumes of garlic that would have reduced you, Tony, to a drivelling coward. I vow the smell of it has even infested my hair."

"Anything to be done?" Tony asked simply. He knew his chief well enough to perceive the vein of grim earnestness through all this flippancy.

"Yes!" Blakeney replied. "The squad of brigands who are scouring this part of France are principally after a family named Frontenac, which consists of father, mother and an invalid daughter. I had already found out something about them in the course of the day, whilst I carted some manure for a farmer close by. Beastly stuff manure, by the way! I tried to get into touch with Monsieur, who is a stubborn optimist, and does not believe that any man could mean harm to him or to his family. I went to him in the guise of a royalist agent, supposed to have inside information of impending arrests. He simply refused to believe me. Well! we've met that type of man before. He will have a terrible awakening to-morrow."

Sir Percy paused for a moment or two, a deep frown between his brows. His keen intellect, alive to all those swift tragedies which he had devoted his life to countermine was already at work envisaging the immediate future, the personages of the coming drama, husband, wife, invalid daughter; then the perquisition, the arrest, summary condemnation and slaughter of three helpless innocents.

"I can't help being sorry for the man," he said after awhile, "though he is an obstinate fool! but it is the wife and daughter whom we cannot allow those savage beasts to capture and to kill. I caught sight of them. The girl is pathetic, frail and crippled. I couldn't bear——"

He broke off abruptly. No need to say more, of course; they understood one another these men who had braved death so often together for love of humanity and for love of sport. Blakeney silent, one firm, slender hand clutched upon the table, was working out a problem of how to rescue three helpless people from that certain death-trap which was already laid for them. The other two waited in equal silence for orders. The League of the Scarlet Pimpernel! pledged to help the innocent and to save the helpless! One to command, nineteen to obey: the two who were here in this filthy, dark attic-room, were the chief's most trusted officers; but the others were not far away!

Seventeen others! scattered about the countryside, disguised, doing menial work in order to keep in touch with the population, spying, hiding in woods or huts; all of them under orders from their chiefs, and prepared for the call from him.

"Tony," Blakeney said at last, "you'd better find Hastings and Stowmaries at once and they must pass the word round to the others. I want three of them—they can draw lots for that—to go to the Four Oaks and there to remain until I can send Ffoulkes to them with full instructions. When you've done that, I want you and Ffoulkes to spend the night in and about Les Amandiers, and gather what you can of the projects of those brigands by keeping your ears open. I'll keep in touch with you from time to time."

"You think," Ffoulkes put in, "that we'll have trouble with the Frontenacs?"

"Not with the ladies, of course," Blakeney replied. "We'll get them safely out of the way before the perambulating army of jackals arrives. With God's help we ought to have time enough to gather a few valuables together. The trouble will be with that obstinate, tiresome man. I feel sure he won't move until the soldiers are hammering at his door. Anyway, I shall know my way in and about the château by to-morrow morning, and will then get into touch with you both at Les Amandiers."

He rose: a tall, straight figure on whom the filthy clothes of a vagabond woodcutter sat with strange incongruity. But even in this strange garb, which was grotesque as well as degrading, there was an extraordinary dignity in the carriage of the head, the broad shoulders, the firm, long Anglo-Saxon limbs, but above all in the flash of the eyes beneath their heavy lids and in the quiet, low-toned voice so obviously accustomed to be heard and obeyed. The two others were ready on the instant to act according to instructions; to act without argument or question. The fire of excitement was in their eyes: the spirit of adventure, of sport for sport's sake had them in its grip.

"Do I go with you now, Blakeney?" Ffoulkes asked, as his chief had remained for a moment standing, as if following a train of thought.

"Yes," Blakeney replied. "And by the way, Ffoulkes, and you too, Tony, while you are at Les Amandiers try and find out about this girl Fleurette the old innkeeper spoke about. He said that the girl would cry her eyes out if anything happened to the Frontenacs. You remember?"

"I do. He also said that she was as pretty a wench as could be found in Dauphiné," Ffoulkes put in with a smile.

"Her father is named Armand," Blakeney rejoined.

"And the lieutenant called him a tiger, rather enigmatically I thought."

"This Fleurette sounds an engaging young person," Lord Tony commented with a smile.

"And should be a useful one in our adventure," Blakeney concluded. "Find out what you can about her."

He was the last to leave the room. Ffoulkes and Lord Tony had already gone down the stone staircase, feeling their way through the darkness. But Sir Percy Blakeney stood for a minute or two longer, erect, silent, motionless. Not Sir Percy Blakeney, that is, the elegant courtier, the fastidious fop, the spoilt child of London society, but the daring adventurer, ready, now as so often before, to throw his life in the balance to save three innocent people from death. Would he succeed? Nay! that he did not doubt. Not for a moment. He would save the Frontenacs as he had saved scores of helpless men, women and children before, or leave his bones to moulder in this fair land where his name had become anathema to the tigers that fed on the blood of their kindred. The true adventurer! Reckless of risks and dangers, with only the one goal in view: Success.

Sport? Of course it was sport! grand, glorious, maddening sport! Sport that made him forget every other joy in life, every comfort, every beatitude. Everything except the exquisite wife who in far-off England waited patiently, with deadly anxiety gnawing at her heart, for news of the man she worshipped. She, perhaps, the greatest heroine of them all.

With a quick sigh, half of impatience, half of longing, Sir Percy Blakeney finally blew out the tallow-lights and made his way out into the open.

3

SIR PERCY HITS BACK

The house where Fleurette was born and where she spent the first eighteen years of her life, still stands about half-way down the road between Sisteron and Serres and close to Laragne, which was then only a village nestling in the valley of the Buëche. To get to it you must first go cautiously down the slope at the head of the old stone bridge, and then climb up another slope to the front door beside the turbulent little mill stream, the soft gurgle of which had lulled Fleurette to sleep ever since her tiny ears had wakened to earthly sounds.

The house is a tumble-down ruin now, only partly roofed in: doors and shutters are half off their hinges: the outside staircase is worm-eaten and unsafe, the white-washed walls are cracked and denuded of plaster; the little shrine above the door has long been bereft of its quaint, rudely-painted statue of St. Anthony of Padua with the Divine Child in his arms. But the wild vine still clings to the old walls, and in the gnarled branches of the old walnut-tree, a venturesome pair of blackbirds will sometimes build their nest.

A certain atmosphere of mystery and romance still lingers in the tiny dell, and when we fly along the road in our twentieth-century motor-car, we are conscious of this romantic feeling, and we exclaim: "Oh! how picturesque!" and ask the chauffeur to halt upon the bridge, and then get our Kodaks to work.

Perhaps when the plate is developed and we look upon the print, we fail to recapture that sense of a picturesque by-gone age, and wonder why we wasted a precious film on what is nothing but a tumble-down old cottage, and why so many tumble-down old cottages are left to crumble away and disfigure the lovely face of France. But a century and a half ago, when Fleurette was born, there was an almond-tree beside the front door, which in the early spring looked as if covered with pink snow. In those days the shutters and the doors and the outside staircase were painted a beautiful green, the walls were resplendent with fresh white-wash every year. In those days too the wild vine turned to a brilliant crimson in the autumn, and in June the climbing rose was just a mass of bloom. Then in May the nightingale often sang in the old walnut-tree, and later on, when Fleurette was tall enough, she always kept a bunch of forget-me-nots in a glass, in the recess above the front door, at the foot of the statue of St. Antoine de Padoue, because, as is well known, he is the saint to appeal to in case one has lost anything one values. One just made the sign of the cross and said fervently: "St. Antoine de Padoue priez pour nous!" and lo! the kindly saint would aid in the search and more often than not the lost treasure would be found.

All this was, of course, anterior to the horrible events which in a few days transformed the genial, kindly people of France into a herd of wild beasts thirsting for each other's blood, and before legalized cruelty, murder and regicide had arraigned that fair land at the bar of history, and tarnished her fair fame for ever. Fleurette was just eighteen when the terrible events came to pass that threatened to wreck her young life, and through which she learned not only how cruel and evil man could be, but also to what height of self-abnegation and heroism they could at times ascend.

Fleurette's birthday was in May, and that day was always for her the gladdest day of the year. For one thing she could reckon on Bibi being home—Bibi being the name by which she had called her father ever since she had learned to babble. Fleurette had no mother, and she and Bibi just worshipped each other. And of course Bibi had come home for her eighteenth birthday, and had stayed three whole days, and he had brought her a lovely shawl, one that was so soft and fleecy that when you rubbed your cheek against it, it felt just like a caress from a butterfly's wing.

Old Louise—who had looked after the house and watched over Fleurette ever since Fleurette's mother had gone up to Heaven to be with the *bon Dieu* and all the Saints—old Louise had cooked a delicious dinner, which was a very difficult thing to do these days when food was scarce and dear, and eggs, butter and sugar only for the very rich who could bribe M'sieu' Colombe, the *épicier* of the Rue Haute, to let them have what they wanted. But no matter! Old Louise was a veritable genius where a dinner was concerned, and M'sieu' Colombe, the grocer, and M'sieu' Duflos the butcher, had allowed her to have all she asked for: a luscious piece of meat, three eggs, a piece of butter, and this without any extra bribe. Then there were still half a dozen bottles of that excellent red wine which Bibi had bought in the happy olden days; and he had opened one of the bottles, and Fleurette had drunk some wine and felt very elated and altogether happy—but for this there was another reason of which more anon.

Of course the latter part of the day had been tinged with sadness, again for that one reason which will appear presently: but not only because of that, but because of Bibi's departure, which, it seems, could not be postponed, although Fleurette begged and begged that he should remain at least until to-morrow so as not to spoil this most perfect day. *Le bon Dieu* alone knew when Fleurette would see Bibi again, his absences from home had of late become more frequent and more prolonged.

Mais voilà! on one's eighteenth birthday one is not going to think of troubles until the very last minute when it is actually on the doorstep. And the day had been entirely glorious. Not a cloud: the sky of such a vivid blue that the forget-me-nots that grew in such profusion beside the stream looked pale and colourless beneath it. The crimson peonies behind the house were in full bloom, and the buds of the climbing rose on the point of bursting.

And now dinner was over. Louise was busy in the kitchen washing up the plates and dishes, and Fleurette was carefully putting away the beautiful silver forks and spoons which had been brought out for the occasion. She was putting them away in the fine leather case with the molleton lining, which set off the glistening silver to perfection, and little Fleurette felt happy and very contented. She worked away in silence because Bibi had leaned his darling old head against the back of his chair, and closed his eyes. Fleurette thought that he had dropped to sleep.

He looked thin and pale, the poor dear, and there were lines of anxiety and discontent around his thin lips: his hair too had of late been plentifully sprinkled with grey. Oh! how Fleurette longed to have him here at Lou Mas. Always and always. It was the only home she had ever known; dear, beautiful, fragrant Lou Mas. Here she would tend him and care for him until all those lines of care upon his face had vanished. And what more likely to bring a smile to his lips than dear old Lou Mas with its white-washed walls and red-tiled roofs, with its green shutters and little mill stream beside which, for nine months in the year, flowers grew in such profusion; violets, forget-me-nots, and lilies of the valley in the spring, and meadowsweet throughout the summer until an early frost cut them down?

As for this room, Fleurette knew that there could not be in the whole of France, anything more beautiful or more cosy. There was the beautiful walnut sideboard, polished until it shone like a mirror, there were the chairs covered in crimson rep, rather faded, it is true, but none the worse for that, and there was Bibi's special arm-chair adorned with that strip of tapestry which Fleurette had worked in cross-stitch, expressly for his birthday the year of her first communion. Never had there been such chairs anywhere. And that beautiful paper on the walls, the red and yellow roses that looked as if you could pick them off their lovely chocolate-coloured ground, and the chandelier with the crystal drops, and the blue vases with the gold handles that adorned the mantelpiece, not to mention the print curtains and the pink and blue check cloth upon the table. Oh, Fleurette loved all these things, they had been the playthings of her childhood and now they were her pride. If only Bibi would smile again, she felt that the whole world would be like Heaven.

And then all at once everything went wrong. Fleurette had got her beautiful new shawl out of its wrappings and draped it round her shoulders and rubbed her cheek against it. Then she had said quite innocently: "It is so lovely, Bibi, and the wool is so soft and fine. I am sure that it came from England."

And it was from that moment that everything went wrong. To begin with, and quite by accident, of course, Bibi broke the stem of the glass out of which he had been drinking, and a quantity of very precious wine was spilt over the beautiful tablecloth.

Whereupon, unaccountably, because of course the tablecloth could be washed, Bibi pushed his plate aside quite roughly and suddenly looked ten years older; so wan and pale and shrivelled and old. Fleurette longed to put her arms round him—as she used to do in the happy olden days—and ask him to tell her what was amiss. She was grown up now—eighteen years old to-day—quite old enough to understand. And if Bibi loved her as she thought he did, he would be comforted.

But there it was! There was something in the expression on Bibi's face that checked Fleurette's impulse. She went on quietly—very quietly, like a little mouse—with her work, and for awhile there was silence in the cosy room with the beautiful roses on the wall that looked as if you could pick them off their chocolate ground: a silence that was unaccountably full of sadness.

4

Bibi was the first to hear the sound of footsteps coming up to the door. He gave a start, just as if he were waking from a dream.

"It's M'sieu' Colombe," Fleurette said.

At once Bibi reproved her, a thing he hardly ever did: "Citizen Colombe," he said sternly.

Fleurette shrugged her plump shoulders: "Ah well——!" she exclaimed.

"You must learn, Fleurette," Bibi insisted still with unwonted severity. "You are old enough to learn."

She said nothing more; only kissed the top of his head, the smooth brown hair, of late so plentifully tinged with grey, and promised that she would learn. She stood by the sideboard intent on putting the silver away, with her back turned to Bibi so that he should not see the soft tone of pink that had crept into her cheeks, as soon as she had perceived that two pairs of feet were treading the path outside the door.

Now there was a vigorous knock against the door, and a cheery, raucous voice called out loudly: "May one enter?"

Fleurette ran to the door and opened it.

"But certainly, certainly," she said, and then added, seemingly very astonished: "Ah! and M'sieu' Amédé too?" From which the casual observer would perhaps infer that the pink colour in her cheeks had been due to the arrival of M'sieu' Colombe, the *épicier* of the Rue Haute, rather than to that of his son Amédé. It was no doubt also the worthy *épicier* with his round florid face, dark, twinkling eyes, and general air of ferocious kindliness that caused the pink colour to spread from Fleurette's cheeks down to her neck and the little bit of throat that peeped out above her kerchief.

The good Colombe had already stalked into the room and with a familiar: "Eh bien! Eh bien! We did contrive to come and drink Fleurette's health after all?" had slapped Bibi vigorously over the lean shoulders. But Amédé had come to a halt on the mat in which he was mechanically wiping his boots as if his very life depended on their cleanliness. Between his fingers he was twirling an immense posy of bright pink peonies, but his eyes were fixed on Fleurette, and on his broad, plain face, which shone with perspiration and good temper, there was a half-shy, wholly-adoring look.

He gulped hard once or twice before he murmured, hoarse with emotion:

"Mam'zelle Fleurette!"

And Fleurette wiped her hot little hand against her apron before she whispered in shy response:

"M'sieu' Amédé!"

Not for these two the new fangled "citoyen" and "citoyenne" decreed in far-off Paris. To their unsophisticated ears the clamour of a trumpet-tongued revolution only came as an unreal and distant echo.

Amédé appeared to have finished cleaning his boots, and Fleurette was able to close the door behind him before she held out her hand for the flowers which he was too bewildered to offer.

"Are these beautiful flowers for me, M'sieu' Amédé?" she asked.

"If you will deign to accept them, Mam'zelle Fleurette," he replied.

She was eighteen and he was just twenty. Neither of them had ever been away more than a few hours from their remote little village of Dauphiné where they were born—she in the little house with the green shutters, and he in the Rue Haute above the shop where his father Hector Colombe had sold tallow-candles and sugar, flour and salt, and lard and eggs to the neighbours, ever since he had been old enough to help *his* father in the business. And when Amédé was four, and Fleurette two, they had made mud pies together in the village street with water from the fountain, and Amédé had warded Fleurette against the many powerful enemies that sometimes threatened her and caused her to scream with terror, such as M'sieu' Duflos the butcher's dog, or Achille the garde-champêtre with his ferocious scowl, or M'ame Amélie's geese.

They had sat together—not side by side you understand, but the boys on the right of the room and the girls on the left—in the little class-room in the presbytery, where M. le Curé taught them their alphabet and subsequently the catechism; and also that two and two make four. They had knelt side by side in the little primitive church at Laragne, their little souls overburdened with emotion and religious fervour, when they made their first communion: Fleurette in a beautiful white dress, with a wreath of white roses on her fair hair, and a long tulle veil that descended right down to her feet; and Amédé in an exquisite cloth coat with brass buttons, a silk waistcoat, buckled shoes and a white ribbon sash on his left arm.

And when Amédé had been old enough to be entrusted with his father's errands over at Serres, a couple of leagues away, Fleurette had climbed behind him on the saddle, and with her arms round his waist, so as to keep herself steady, they had ridden together along the winding road white with dust, Ginette, the good old mare, ambling very leisurely as if she knew that her riders were in no hurry to get anywhere that day.

And now Fleurette was eighteen and Amédé twenty and her hair was like ripe corn, and her eyes as blue as the sky on a midsummer morn, whilst her mouth was dewy and fragrant as a rose in June. No wonder that poor Amédé felt as if his feet were of lead and his neck too big for his cravat, and when presently she asked him to fill a vase with water out of the carafe so that she could place the beautiful flowers in it, is it a wonder that he spilt the water all over the floor, seeing that his clumsy hands met her dainty fingers around the neck of the carafe?

The good Hector pretended to be very angry with his son for his clumsiness.

"Voyez-moi cet imbécile!" he said with that gruff voice of his which had become a habit with him, because he had to use it all day in order to ward off the naughty village urchins who tried to steal the apples out of his shop.

"Mam'zelle Fleurette, why don't you box his ears?"

Which, of course, was a very funny proposition that caused Fleurette and Amédé to laugh immoderately first and then to whisper and to chaff whilst they mopped the water off the tiled floor. And the good Hector turned once more to Bibi, and shaking his powerful fist at nothing in particular, he brought it down with a crash upon the table.

"And now those gredins, those limbs of Satan are taking him away for cannon-fodder. Ah! the devils! the pigs! the pig-devils!"

Bibi looked up inquiringly.

"Taking him away, are they?" he asked drily. Then he added with an indifferent shrug of the shoulders: "Amédé is twenty, isn't he?"

"What's that to do with their dragging him away from me, when I want him to help in the shop?" Hector retorted with what he felt was unanswerable logic.

"What would be the good of keeping shop, my good Hector," Bibi rejoined simply, "if France was invaded by foreigners as she is already ruined by traitors?"

"Well! And isn't she ruined now by all those devils up in Paris who can think of nothing better than war or murder?" growled Hector Colombe, heedless of the quick gesture of warning which Bibi had given him.

Adèle, the girl from the village who gave old Louise a hand about the house when Bibi was at home, had just come in from the kitchen with a pile of plates and dishes which she proceeded to range upon the dresser. Hector shrugged his big shoulders. Whoever would think of taking notice of Adèle? A wench who got five sous a day for scrubbing floors! An under-sized, plain-faced creature with flat feet and red elbows. Bah!

But Bibi still put up a warning finger:

"Little pitchers have long ears," he said in a whisper.

"Oh! I know, I know," Hector rejoined gruffly. "It is the fashion these days for us all to spy on one another. A pretty pass they have brought us to," he added, "your friends in Paris."

To this Bibi made no reply. No doubt he knew that it was impossible to argue with Hector, once the worthy *épicier* was in one of his moods. Adèle had finished her task and glided out of the room, silent, noiseless, furtive as a little rat, which she vaguely resembled with small, keen eyes, and pointed nose and chin. In a corner of the room, by the window, still busy with those flowers which seemingly would not set primly in the vase, Fleurette and Amédé were talking under their breath.

"I'm going away, Mam'zelle Fleurette," said he.

"Going away, M'sieu' Amédé? Whither? When?"

"They want me in the army."

"What for?" she asked naïvely.

"To fight against the English."

"But you won't go, will you, M'sieu' Amédé?"

"I must, Mam'zelle Fleurette."

"Oh, but what shall I—I mean what will M'sieu' Colombe do? You must remain here, to help him in the shop." And fight against it as she would, there was an uncomfortable little lump in her throat when she pictured how terribly lost M'sieu' Colombe would be without his son.

"Father is very angry," Amédé said rather hoarsely, because he too had an uncomfortable lump in his throat now. "But it seems there's nothing to be done. I have to go."

"When?" Fleurette murmured, so softly, so softly, that only a lover's ears could possibly have caught the whisper.

"I have to present myself to-morrow," Amédé replied, "before M'sieu' le Commissaire de police at Serres."

"To-morrow? And I have been so happy to-day!"

The cry came from an overburdened little heart, brought face to face with its first sorrow. Fleurette no longer attempted to keep back her tears, and Amédé, not quite sure whether he should cry because he was going away, or dance with joy because it was his going that was making Fleurette cry, put in time by wiping his face which was streaming with perspiration and tears.

"I wish I could at least have seen those children wedded," the worthy *épicier* muttered in the interval of blowing his nose with a noise like a cloud-burst. "At least," he added with the good round oath which he reserved for occasions such as these, "before they take my Amédé away."

Bibi on the other hand appeared to be more philosophical.

"We must wait for better times," he said, "and anyhow Fleurette is too young to marry."

5

SIR PERCY HITS BACK

Parting is not such sweet sorrow as the greatest of all poets would have us believe. At any rate Fleurette did not find it at all sweet, on this her eighteenth birthday, which should have been a very happy one.

It was bad enough saying "adieu" to Bibi. But Fleurette was accustomed to that. Of late Bibi had been so often and so long absent from home; sometimes weeks—nay! months—would elapse and there would be no Bibi to fondle Fleurette and bring life and animation within those white-washed walls that held all that was dearest to her in the world. It was undoubtedly heart-rending to bid Bidi adieu: but in a way, one knew that the darling would come back to Lou Mas as soon as he was able, come for one of those surprise visits that made Fleurette as gay as a linnet all the while they lasted. But to say good-bye to Amédé was a different matter. He was going into the army. He was going to fight the English. *Le bon Dieu* alone knew if Amédé would ever come back. Perhaps he would be killed. Perhaps—oh! perhaps——

Never in her life had Fleurette been so sad.

And now the last good-byes had been said. Bibi, accompanied by M'sieu' Colombe and Amédé, had walked away in the direction of the village, where he would pick up his horse, and start along the main road that led to Serres and thence to Paris.

Fleurette remained on the bridge for some time, shading her eyes against the sun, because they ached so from all the tears which she had shed. The three men had become mere specks, 'way down the road: old Louise had gone back to her kitchen with Adèle, only Fleurette remained standing on the bridge alone. Tears were still running down her cheeks, whilst with aching eyes she strove to catch a last sight of Bibi as he and his two companions disappeared round the bend of the road. Or was it Amédé she was trying to see?

The afternoon sun had spread a mantle of gold over the snowy crests of Pelvoux: on the sapphire sky myriads of tiny clouds seemed to hold hearts of living flame in their fleecy bosoms. The wavy ribbon of the Buëche was like a giant mirror that reflected a whole gamut of glowing tints, blue and gold and purple, whilst on the winding road the infinitesimal atoms of dust seemed like low-lying clouds of powdered topaz. Suddenly in the direction of Sisteron those clouds rose, more dense: something more solid than powdered topaz animated the distance: grew gradually more tangible and then became definite. Fleurette now could easily distinguish ten or a dozen men coming this way. They all wore red caps on their heads. Ahead of them came a man on horseback. He wore a tricorne hat, adorned with a tricolour cockade, and the sun drew sparks of flame from the steel bit in his horse's mouth and from the brass bosses and buckles on the harness.

Now Fleurette could hear the dull stamping of hoofs on the dusty road, and the tramping of heavy weary footsteps: and she watched, fascinated, these men coming along.

All at once the rider put his horse to a trot, and the next moment he reined in on the bridge. He put out his hand and cried a sharp: "Halte!" whereupon the other men all came to a halt. Fleurette stood there wondering what all this meant. Vaguely she guessed that these men must be soldiers, though, of a truth, with the exception of the one on horseback, and who appeared to be their officer, there was very little that was soldierly about them. Their red caps were of worsted, and adorned with what had once been a tricolour cockade, but was now so covered with dust that the colours were wellnigh undistinguishable. The men's coats too, once blue in colour and fitted with brass buttons, were torn and faded, with several buttons missing: their breeches were stained with mud, they had no stockings inside their shoes, and it would have been impossible to say definitely whether their shirts had been of a drabby grey when they were new, or whether they had become so under stress of wear and dirt. Fleurette's recollection flew back to the smart soldiers she used to see when she was a tiny tot and Bibi took her to Serres or Sisteron on fête days when the military band would march past in their beautiful clothes all glittering with brass buttons, and their boots polished up so that you could almost see yourself in them.

But there! every one knew that these were terribly hard times and that new clothes were very, very dear: so Fleurette supposed that the poor soldiers had to wear out their old ones just like everybody else. And her sensitive little heart gave an extra throb or two, for she had suddenly remembered that M'sieu' Amédé would also be a soldier very soon, wearing a shabby coat, and perhaps no stockings inside his shoes. Still thinking of M'sieu' Amédé, she was very polite to the man on horseback, although he was unnecessarily abrupt with her, asking her gruffly whether Citizen Armand was within.

Fleurette said "No!" quite gently, and then, choosing to ignore the coarse manner in which the man uttered a very ugly oath, she went on: "Father has been gone a quarter of an hour and more, and if you——"

"Citizen Armand, I asked for," the officer broke in roughly, "not your father."

"Father's name is Armand," Fleurette said, still speaking very politely. "I thought you were asking for him."

The horseman, she thought, realizing his mistake, should have excused himself for speaking so rudely: but he did nothing of the sort. He just shrugged his shoulders and said in a very curious way, which sounded almost like a sneer:

"Oh! is that how it is? You are Citizen Armand's daughter, are you?"

"Yes! M'sieu' l'officier."

"Call me citizen lieutenant," the man retorted roughly. "Hasn't your father taught you to speak like a good patriot?"

Fleurette would not have admitted for the world that she was half afraid of this unkempt, unshaved officer with the gruff voice, but she felt intimidated, shy, ill at ease. She would have given worlds to have some one friendly beside her, old Louise, for instance, or even Adèle.

"Shall I call M'ame Louise," she suggested, "to speak with you?"

"No," the man replied curtly, "what's the use if your father isn't there? Which way did he go?"

"To the village first, M'sieu'—I mean citizen, to pick up his horse which he always leaves at M'sieu' Colombe's stables. He is going to Paris afterwards."

"How far is it to the village?"

"Less than a quarter of a league—er—citizen."

"And the house," the officer asked again, "where the ci-devant Frontenacs live, is that far?"

"About half a league by the road from here," Fleurette replied, "the other side of the village. There is a short cut behind this house, past the mill, but——"

The man, however, was no longer listening to what she said. He muttered something that sounded very much like an oath, and then turned to the soldiers: "Allons! Marche!" he commanded sharply. The men appeared terribly dusty and tired and hardly made a movement to obey: at the first call of "Halte," some of them had thrown themselves down by the edge of the road and stretched out full length on the heaps of hard stones piled up there; others had wandered down the slope by the bridge, and lying flat on the ground were slaking their thirst in the cool, clear water of the stream. Fleurette was very sorry for them.

"May they wait a moment, M'sieu' le— I mean citizen lieutenant," she pleaded, "I'll get them something to drink. We haven't much, but I know Louise won't——"

But the officer took no further notice either of her or of the men. Having given his order to march, he had readjusted the reins in his hands, and struck his spurs somewhat viciously into his horse's flanks. The horse reared and plunged for a moment, then started off at a sharp trot, clouds of dust flying out from under its hoofs.

The men made an effort to rise. Fleurette put up a finger and smiled at them all.

"Wait one minute," she said, and ran quickly back into the house.

There was the best part of a bottle left of that good red wine: Bibi had not touched it again after he broke the stem of his glass. Fleurette had picked up the bottle and taken a tin mug from the dresser and was about to start out again before Louise thought of asking her what she was up to.

"There are some poor, tired soldiers outside on the bridge," Fleurette replied, "I want to take them something to drink. There's not much of it, and twelve of them to share it, but it will be better than nothing, and perhaps le bon Dieu will make a miracle and make it be enough. They seemed so thirsty, poor dears."

"Let Adèle go," Louise said curtly, "I don't like you speaking with those vagabonds."

And while Adèle ran out, as she was bid, with mug and bottle, Louise continued to mutter half under her breath:

"I can't abide those sansculottes. Brigands the lot of them. What are they doing in the neighbourhood, I'd like to know. Up to no good you may depend. Let Adèle talk to them. It is not fit for a well-brought-up wench like you to be seen in such company."

Fleurette did not pay much attention to old Louise's mutterings. There was plenty to do in the house with washing up and tidying things away. And it was Louise's habit to grumble at anything that was in any way unusual: a wet day in August, or a mild one in December, a *calèche* on the road, a horseman, a soldier, or a letter for Bibi. She was always called "old Louise," although, in truth, she had scarce reached middle age; but her skin was dry and rough like the soil of her native Dauphiné, her face and hands were prematurely wrinkled and her voice had become harsh of late, probably for want of use, like a piece of mechanism that has stood still, and begun to grind for want of a lubricant. In Armand's house, when he was absent, she ruled supreme. Fleurette never dreamed of disobeying, and Armand's only peremptory orders to Louise were never to mention politics or current events to the child.

Louise had nursed Fleurette at her breast when Fleurette's mother died in child-bed, and she had left her own baby in the care of her sister, already a widow and childless. Considerations of money had prompted her at the time, for Monsieur Armand, as he was then, had made her liberal offers: afterwards it was too late to regret. Her own daughter, Adèle, born of an unknown father who loved and rode away, had been brought up to a life of drudgery by her aunt, who sent the girl out to earn her own living as soon as she could toddle, whilst Fleurette was brought up to have everything she wanted: petted and idolized by a father plentifully supplied with money. Fleurette and Adèle were foster-sisters, but with destinies as wide apart as the peaks of Pelvoux.

But Louise never spoke one bitter word, when she saw Adèle with toil-worn hands scrubbing the kitchen floor on which Fleurette trod with dainty, high-heeled shoes. Perhaps she loved her foster-child more than she did her own: perhaps it was only the same considerations of money that already guided her conduct before, which prompted her later to indulgence toward the rich man's daughter, whilst reserving her pent-up acrimony for the household drudge. No one knew what Louise's feelings were towards Adèle—Adèle herself least of all. The girl was silent, reserved, self-contained, very conscientious in her work, but not very responsive to the many kindnesses shown her by M'sieu' Armand or Mam'zelle Fleurette. She still lived with her aunt who had brought her up, and she appeared to lay no claim on her mother's affection: she had earned her own living ever since she was ten years of age, and now, at eighteen, she looked more like a woman than a girl: her little face was all pinched up, the lips thin, the eyes either sharp as needles or expressionless like those of a rodent. She hardly ever spoke and no one had ever seen her smile.

Old Louise's mutterings presently turned to Adèle's prolonged absence:

"What is the girl about now, I should like to know? She is not a gossip as a rule."

She went on with her washing up for a moment or two longer and then said sharply:

"Run along, Fleurette, and see what the wench is doing. Lazy baggage, with all the work there's still to do."

Fleurette ran out at once. She too wondered why Adèle was such a long time. And there, sure enough, standing on the bridge was Adèle talking to the soldiers. The officer was already out of sight. Adèle talking! and Fleurette even thought that she heard her giggle. Incredible! The soldiers were all laughing and one of them was in the act of drinking the last drop out of the tin mug.

Fleurette stood for a moment on the doorstep, vaguely wondering what in the world had come over Adèle, when a rather curious incident occurred:

the soldiers were all laughing, jesting apparently with the girl, and one of them, with head tilted back, was draining the last drop out of the tin mug. Fleurette was on the point of calling to Adèle when her attention was arrested by the appearance of an old man carrying what looked like a load of faggots tied up in a coarse sacking. He seemed to have climbed the slopes on the opposite side of the road; at any rate there he was, all of a sudden, immediately behind the group of soldiers.

He appeared to be drunk, for he staggered as he walked and leaned heavily on a stout gnarled stick. Fleurette could not have told you exactly how it all happened, but all of a sudden Adèle's giggling and the soldiers' jests were interrupted by the old faggot-carrier tumbling down clumsily, right between them all.

Adèle screamed. The soldiers swore, and one of them went to the length of giving the old man a savage kick, whilst two others incontinently picked him up between them and flung him over the parapet of the bridge. Fleurette gave a cry of dismay and ran to the poor man's assistance. She felt hot with indignation at such wanton brutality. How right, she thought as she ran, had old Louise's estimate been of these soldiers—little better than brigands they were, and cruel to boot. The poor faggot-carrier, for such he seemed to be, was lying half in and half out of the stream: the grass and sloping ground had somewhat broken his fall but nevertheless there he lay, motionless and groaning piteously. Fleurette called peremptorily to Adèle to come and help her hoist up the poor man on his legs again. He was very dirty, dressed in nothing but rags, his feet swathed in coarse bass matting; he was stockingless, shirtless and hatless; but he appeared to be powerfully built and Fleurette marvelled how he could have allowed himself to be thus maltreated without a struggle. No doubt he was drunk or crippled with rheumatism.

Up on the bridge the soldiers were preparing to start once more on their way. They took no more notice of their unfortunate victim nor of Adèle; but Fleurette looking up felt that their last glance was for her; some of them were regarding her with a leer, others with more pronounced malevolence. She distinctly saw one man nudge his neighbour and point a finger at her: whereat both of them gave a mocking laugh.

She felt hurt and indignant: in her sheltered life she had never met with malevolence before. However for the moment, her first care was for the poor faggot-carrier. Adèle had come to her assistance, and together the two girls succeeded in getting the old man on his legs again. He appeared more scared than hurt, and with his big, toil-stained hands, he felt himself all over to see, perhaps, if any bones were broken; and all the while he kept on murmuring rather pathetically: "Nom de nom, de nom de Dieu!" as if surprised that such a tragic adventure should have happened to him.

Fleurette asked him if he were hurt, and he replied: "No, Mam'zelle—that is citizeness," and he added: "Ah, I shall never get used to these new ways. I am too old."

"Can you get on your way now?" Fleurette asked.

"Yes! yes, Mam'zelle, that is citizeness. But," he went on piteously, "I am so hungry. I come from over Mison way and I have not had a bite since seven o'clock this morning."

This naturally stirred Fleurette's kind, compassionate heart. She told Adèle to run into the house and ask Louise for a hunk of bread. Adèle, silent and self-contained once more, obeyed without comment. The incident was closed as far as Fleurette was concerned. Her thoughts flew back to Amédé and to his last day and evening which he would be spending in his cosy home. She wished she had been bold enough to ask him to come and bid her a last adieu to-morrow morning before he went away to fight the English.

And while she stood there gazing out over the valley where the metal cross on the church steeple of Laragne glistened like gold in the sunlight, a strange voice—soft yet firm—suddenly struck her ear from somewhere close behind her.

"Papers and valuables are behind the panel in Madame's room."

She swung round terrified, so terrified that the cry she was about to utter died away in her throat. She looked about her, scared, shivering with that nameless dread which assails every mortal in face of the supernatural. And yet everything seemed as peaceful as before: the little mill stream splashed and gurgled with its soft, persistent sound; in the old walnut-tree a thrush was calling to its mate and the old faggot-carrier was busy tying up his faggots into the sacking again. Fleurette's eyes rested for an instant anxiously upon him. She expected to see him raise his head, to look about him, to appear scared as she was herself; but he gave no sign of having heard anything of that mysterious voice, fresh and compelling like a command from heaven. Oh no! Fleurette could not have screamed. She was too panic-stricken just at first to utter a sound.

And yet nothing had really happened to alarm the most timorous. Only those few words spoken by an unseen tongue. What did they mean? What could they mean? They were simple and commonplace enough: Fleurette repeated them to herself mechanically:

"Papers and valuables are behind the panel in Madame's room."

What did it mean? What papers? what valuables? and why should the mysterious speaker have wished her to know that they were behind the panel in Madame's room? Madame was, of course, Madame de Frontenac over at the château, and all of a sudden Fleurette remembered that the mounted soldier had asked her the way to the château. Gradually she was feeling less scared. Less scared but more excited. She looked round at the statue of St. Antoine, at whose feet she had this morning placed a fresh bunch of forget-me-nots. Somehow she associated the mysterious voice with St. Antoine. Perhaps Madame had lost some valuable papers, and the kind saint had chosen this means of letting her know where her treasure was. Fleurette made the sign of the cross on her bosom; she remembered the story of Jeanne d'Arc which M. le Curé used to tell her, of how the humble shepherdess of Domrémy had been compelled by heavenly voices to go forth and deliver France from her enemies and never rest until she had seen the King crowned in his cathedral of Rheims.

Fleurette felt something of that same fervour which had animated Jeanne d'Arc. She felt that she must go forth and tell Madame about the valuables and the papers. The evening was warm and she would not need her shawl. She could go just as she was as far as the château and be back before the twilight had faded into night. Adèle in the meanwhile appeared at the front door, she had her shawl over her head, and a hunk of bread in her hand. Then only did Fleurette remember the old faggot-carrier. She turned to him in order to bid him "God-speed." He stood there quite motionless, leaning upon his stick bending under the weight of his load of faggots which he had hoisted upon his back. His lank hair hung over his wrinkled forehead and half concealed his eyes. But, suddenly through the veil of lank grey hair Fleurette met the man's glance fixed upon her; and her heart gave a queer jump. Those were not the eyes of a decrepit old man; they were young and clear and bright: of a luminous grey-blue, with heavy lids that could not wholly conceal the humorous twinkle in the eyes, nor yet the kindly, searching glance which was fixed on Fleurette.

This was the moment when she really would have screamed. The sense of something ununderstandable and unreal was more than she could bear, she would have screamed, but those twinkling, searching eyes held her, and at the same time seemed to reassure her, to tell her not to be afraid. She felt as if she were in a dream: unable to do anything, only to stare and stare at the old faggot-carrier, while gradually all her terrors seemed to fall away from her, and she was filled with a sense of courage and of determination. The whole incident, the voice, the glance, her terror and reassurance had lasted less than five seconds. Already Adèle was close by. She was bringing the bread for the poor, half-starved man, and Fleurette now watched him, fascinated, as he took the bread with a humble: "Merci, Mam'zelle," and started at once on it, like a man who has not tasted food all day. He was just a decrepit old man, bent with rheumatism, dirty, unkempt, insecure on his tottering limbs. He even raised his eyes once, and once more looked at her; but the glance was dim like that of an old man; there was no twinkle in the eyes, only the weariness of poverty and old age.

And Fleurette felt that she had dreamed it all: the voice, the glance, the message from St. Antoine, just as her terrors had faded from her, so now her excitement vanished too. It must all have been a dream. It *was* a dream! Perhaps old Louise, who was versed in all kinds of dreamlore, would know of an explanation for the whole mysterious occurrence. Feeling very tired all of a sudden—for she felt the reaction after the tenseness of the last few moments—she went back into the house. In the doorway she turned to have a last look at the old faggot-carrier; leaning heavily upon his stick, he was making his way along the bank of the stream. The last she saw of him was his big bundle done up in sacking and his legs bending beneath the weight.

Adèle wrapped in her shawl had gone the other way. She was already up on the bridge. With a little sigh of disappointment Fleurette went into the house. It had been such an exciting dream!

But she did not speak about it to old Louise; she just went quietly about the house, doing one or two little bits of work that Adèle had left undone.

The slowly-sinking sun had turned the gold on Pelvoux' snowy crest to a brilliant rose, when Fleurette suddenly announced to Louise that she was going over to the château. She often went there, and at all hours of the day.

"So long as you are home before dark," was Louise's only remark. "I don't like those down-at-heel soldiers being about."

Fleurette promised that she would not be late. She picked up her beautiful new shawl and wrapped it round her shoulders. The château was not far; over by the mountain track, it was not more than a quarter of a league at most. Swiftly Fleurette ran out of the house and then along the edge of the stream—the same way that the old faggot-carrier had gone an hour or so ago.

And now the mantle of twilight was falling over the valley; the jade-coloured sky held myriads of tiny, fleecy clouds of a brilliant glowing crimson, which one by one faded into grey, alone the snow of Pelvoux reflected the glory of the sinking sun and in the old walnut-tree the thrush's song was stilled.

6

THE place was always called le château for want of a more appropriate name. As a matter of fact it was just a large, rumbling, roomy farmhouse with stables and stable-yards and sheds and outbuildings, all built in a mass and at different times as necessity demanded, in the midst of a really fine park, shady with century old trees and fragrant with acacias and roses. Here for many generations the de Frontenacs, father and son, had lived, toiled and died, farming their land, honouring their King and otherwise not troubling their heads over much with politics or with art or literature. They were good, kindly, honest folk, all of them, and if the light of their intellect burned somewhat dim, that of their charity was always kept fed and bright.

They belonged tc that sturdy stock which had given

France one of her most valiant sons in Louis de Frontenac, the man who had made Eastern Canada a jewel worthy of the crown of France. The jewel had been lost since then, irretrievably lost to the English, and the crown of France been dragged in the mire of a bloody revolution, its glory for ever overshadowed by the unforgivable crime of a purposeless regicide: but the present holder of the ancient name and owner of the lands had kept himself aloof from the awful dissensions that raged in the big cities; he had remained in his heart loyal to his martyred King, and though shorn of most of his wealth, deprived of a great deal of his inheritance, perpetually threatened with confiscation or attainder, he continued to lead the simple life, hoping for better things, detached as far as he was able from the turmoil that was ruining his country and shaming her in the eyes of the world.

At all seasons of the year, and in all weathers, he could be seen out on his farm, directing the work in fields or stables, clad in rough boots and breeches, abrupt of speech, but kindly in deeds, beloved by some, envied by others, hated only by those few who see in every noble life a reproach to their own. His wife was the daughter of an Admiral in the late King's navy, who had thought it prudent to serve the Republic, as he had served his King, with commendable detachment from his country's politics. Though brought up in the midst of the gaieties and luxuries of Paris, Anne de Grandville had been quite content to follow the husband of her choice to the lonely farmhouse in Dauphiné, and to fall in with his bucolic ways: she donned a cotton kirtle and linen apron as readily as she had donned silken panniers in the past, and took as much pride in her cooking now as she had done once in her proficiency in the dance.

At one time Charles de Frontenac had sorely grieved because he had no son to whom he could bequeath his glorious name and fine inheritance, but now he was glad. With France handed over to the control of assassins, bandits, and regicides, the name of Frontenac might, he opined, just as well die out. What was the use of toiling to improve land which to-morrow might be wrested from its rightful owners: what was the use of saving money which would probably on the morrow fall into the hands of brigands? "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on this earth where rust and moth doth corrupt and where thieves break through and steal!" had never been so wise an admonition as it was to-day. All that Charles de Frontenac hoped to do was to put by a sufficient competence to keep his wife and invalid daughter in comfort once he was under the ground. That daughter was the apple of his eye. Bereft of position and most of his wealth, all his thoughts and hopes were centred on this delicate being who seemed like the one ray of sunshine amidst thunder-clouds of disappointment and treachery.

Rose de Frontenac had been a cripple from birth, and it was her delicacy and her helplessness that had so endeared her to her father. He was a man resplendent with vigour and of herculean strength: one of those bull-necked men who could have taken his place in an ox-team and not proved a weakling. His hands were rough, his fist as hard as a hammer. His clothes smelt of damp earth and of manure; the descendant of a long line of aristocrats, Charles de Frontenac, was above all a son of the soil. To him his pale-faced, fragile daughter seemed like a being from another world; he hardly dared touch her cheek with his thick, clumsy fingers, nor dared he approach her save after copious ablutions and sprays of scent. His heart was as big as his body. He adored his daughter, he loved his wife, he beamed with fondness for Fleurette: Fleurette who was as gay as a linnet, who could always bring a smile to the pale lips of his wan, white Rose: Fleurette, who could sing like a lark, prattle like a young sparrow and whose corn-coloured hair smelt of wild thyme and of youth.

7

SIR PERCY HITS BACK

Fleurette had walked very fast. She was still tremendously excited and would have run all the way, only that the road for the most part led sharply uphill and that her heart was beating and pumping wildly with agitation.

Strangely enough the gates of the park were wide open, which was very unusual, as they were always kept closed for fear of the foot-pads and vagabonds. Old Pierre, who was in charge of the gate, was nowhere to be seen. Fleurette ran along the sanded avenue which, bordered by bosquets of acacia and elder, led in sharp curves up to the house. Twilight was slowly fading into evening, but even through the gathering darkness Fleurette noticed that the avenue, usually so beautifully raked and tidy, was all trampled and knocked about as if by the weight of many heavy feet. A minute later the main block of the château stood out before her, like a solid mass silhouetted against a jade-coloured sky. Just above the pointed roof of the turret at the furthest angle of the façade, a star shone with a cold, silvery radiance.

The entrance into the main building was under a broad archway which intersected the façade and led into the great farmyard and to the sheds and farm buildings. Fleurette felt vaguely conscious that something unusual had occurred at the château; though the place looked peaceful enough, it appeared strangely deserted, at this hour, when usually men and maids were still about their work. She slipped quickly under the archway, and turning sharply to the left, she came to the great paved hall where servants and farm-hands sat at meals.

She found the place in a strange state of confusion: the men—they were all old men these days, as all the young ones had had to go and join the army and fight the English—the men were standing about in groups, talking and gesticulating with their arms, after the manner of the people of Dauphiné who are glib of speech and free with their gestures; the maids were gathered together in the dark corner of the room, holding their aprons to their eyes. The oil lamp which hung from the white-washed ceiling had not yet been lit: only one or two tallow candles on the table guttered in their pewter sconces.

Old Mathieu, who was the acknowledged father of the staff and who was affectionately called Papa by the maids, was the first to spy Fleurette, who stood disconcerted in the doorway.

"Ah! Mam'zelle Fleurette! Mam'zelle Fleurette!" he exclaimed and lifted his hands and cast up his eyes with an expression of woe: "Quel malheur! Mon Dieu, quel malheur!"

He had on his bottle-green coat, his buckled shoes, and the white cotton gloves which he wore when he served the family at meals upstairs. They had just finished dinner, it seems, when the awful calamity occurred.

"But what is it, papa?" Fleurette asked, feeling quite ready to cry in sympathy. "What has happened?"

"The soldiers, Mam'zelle!" papa replied, and a fresh groan went the round of men and women alike, and one or two of the girls sobbed aloud.

Now as far as Fleurette was concerned, as recently as this very morning, the inner meaning of these words "the soldiers!" would not perhaps have had much significance. In her own little home, by Bibi's strict orders, politics and social questions were never discussed. Fleurette was not supposed to know anything of the conflicts that were raging in the great cities, in the name of liberty and of fraternity. The horrors of summary arrests, of perquisitions, of sentences without trial, of wholesale executions, of hatred and revenge and lust were supposed to be beyond her ken; and knowing Bibi's abhorrence of those subjects being broached, she kept her counsels and her knowledge to herself. But Fleurette was not brainless, and she had a large heart. With her brain she had noted many things which were wilfully kept away from her, and her kind heart had often been filled with pity at many of the tales which she had heard in the village, tales of suffering under this new kind of tyranny, wielded, it seems, in the name of liberty and of the brotherhood of man. She had heard many things and had forgotten nothing; but somehow until this morning these things had seemed remote, like the tales of ogres and demons which are told to frighten children. She had not disbelieved them, but vaguely she felt that nothing of the sort could possibly happen to people whom she knew and loved.

But since this morning many things had occurred which had widened her range of vision. Amédé, who did not want to go away, was being dragged from home in order to be made into a soldier and to fight the English. She had actually seen some of those soldiers, ragged, uncouth and unkempt, with their officer, like a great bully, speaking to her, as if she were a mere slut out of the streets. He had jeered when she told him that she was Citizen Armand's daughter, and the soldiers had nudged one another and seemed to mock her when she met their glance. Then again she had heard mysterious voices and seen something in the person of a decrepit old faggot-carrier that had thrilled and puzzled her. All these things had worked a subtle change in Fleurette. The tales of ogres and demons no longer appeared quite so remote. The fact that there were evil and sorrow in the world had in a vague kind of way been brought home to her, and also that the spectre of death and misery of which she had only heard was actually lurking in this peaceful corner of Dauphiné and had already knocked at this very door.

"The soldiers!" meant something to her now.

"What happened?" she asked, and a dozen tongues were ready to embark on the telling of the tragic event. It was just after dinner. Madame and Mademoiselle had retired to the boudoir, as usual, and Monsieur was sipping his wine in the dining-room, when the great bell at the gate clanged loudly. Pierre, who was still at work in the stables, ran to open the gate: he was almost knocked down by two men on horseback who, without a word or question, rode past him along the avenue up to the house followed by a dozen men or more in tattered uniforms and wearing dirty red caps on their heads. The sound of horses and of men stamping the ground brought some of the maids and farm-hands out into the yard. The soldiers had come to a halt under the archway, the two riders then dismounted and ordered André to take their horses round to the stables. André, of course, did not dare disobey. Then, as the entrance door was closed, one of the soldiers knocked loudly against it with the butt-end of his musket, whilst one of those who had been on horseback and who appeared to be in authority called out summarily:

"Open in the name of the Republic!"

Old Mathieu, who was upstairs clearing away the dinner things, terribly scared, ran down to open the door. Again without a word or question, the soldiers pushed past him until they came to the vestibule where they demanded to know where were the ci-devant Frontenacs. Old Mathieu here paused in his narrative and once more threw up his hands and cast up his eyes in horror.

"Ci-devant, Mam'zelle!" he exclaimed. "I ask you! Just as those devils up in Paris talked of our poor martyred King and Queen!"

Of course he tried to stop the brigands from going up to see Madame like that, in their dusty shoes and dirty clothes. But what could he do alone among so many? Ah! if only Baptiste and Jean, Achille and Henri had been there, as in the good old days, fine sturdy fellows of the Dauphiné: they would soon have got the better of these down-at-heel bandits, and if it was a case of protecting Madame and Mademoiselle, why! there would have been some broken heads, and the soldiers of the Republic would have sung another song than they were singing now—the muckworms! But there! Henri and André and the lot of the young ones had all been taken for cannon-fodder, to fight against the English, and there were only a few fogies left now like he—Mathieu—and the women.

Anyway, poor old papa was helpless. All he could do was to precede those hell-hounds upstairs, so that he might at least warn Monsieur of what was coming. But even this they would not let him do; as soon as he had reached the upstairs landing, the same man who had ordered him to open the front door in the name of the Republic, and who wore a tricolour sash round his middle, this same man grabbed him by the shoulder and thrust him aside as if he were a bundle of faggots. And without more ado, he just walked into the dining-room where Monsieur was still quietly sipping his last glass of wine.

From seeing Monsieur sitting there, the beautiful long-stemmed wine-glass in his hand, his face quite serene, you would have thought that he had heard nothing of the turmoil on the stairs. But he had heard everything, the tramping of feet, the rough voices, the curt command to open in the name of the Republic. He knew what was coming. Perhaps he had expected it long ago. It was well to be prepared for anything these days. Anyway, there he sat, glass in hand, his elbow resting on the table, where Mathieu had but a few minutes ago been engaged in clearing away the dessert. At the rude entry made by all those ragamuffins into his beautifully ordered dining-room, he just turned his head and looked at the men.

"In the name of the Republic," the man with the sash said curtly.

Monsieur put his glass down and rose slowly to his feet:

"What is it you want?" he asked quietly.

"The rest of the family, first of all," the man with the sash replied. "I want you all here together."

"Madame de Frontenac and my daughter Rose are not at home," said Monsieur, still speaking very quietly.

"That's a lie," the other retorted. "They were at meal here with you."

And with careless finger he pointed to the serviettes and plates which still littered the table. Monsieur did not wince under the insult; nor was the saying of such a brigand an insult to so high-minded a gentleman as Monsieur. All he said was:

"That is so. Madame and Mlle. de Frontenac were at dinner with me, until half an hour ago when they left the house together."

"Whither did they go?"

"That I do not know."

"Which is another lie."

"If I did know," Monsieur rejoined imperturbably, "I would not tell you."

"We'll soon see about that," the man with the sash said grimly. He then turned to the soldier who appeared to be in command over the others: "Allons! citizen lieutenant," he said curtly, "the rest is your business. The two women have got to be found. That is the first thing, after that we shall see."

The officer then ordered two of his men to stand on guard over Monsieur, and since then the tramp, tramp of the soldiers' feet had resounded throughout the château. Upstairs they went, and downstairs; in Madame's room and in Mademoiselle's, in the kitchen, the stables, the offices. They interrogated the men, they bullied the women; they turned everything topsy-turvy; they raked about in the hay and the straw of the stables, they scoured the park, they glued their ugly, dirty noses to the sanded paths, to try and find the imprint of footsteps. But neither of

Madame or of Mademoiselle had they yet found a trace. They were still at it, raking and scouring and searching. In the intervals they tried to browbeat Monsieur, threatening him with summary shooting one moment, which only made him laugh and shrug his shoulders, and promising him immunity for his women-folk if he would say where they could be found. But these promises only made Monsieur laugh and again shrug his shoulders.

"Immunity?" he said. "They have that already, thank God! for they are beyond your reach now. If they were not, do you think I would trust to your promises?"

Old Mathieu paused. The story had neared its end—this tale of woe and anxiety and horror, such as the worthy old man had never thought to see. The others had not much to say; the maids were still crying, with excitement rather than with grief, and the old men had stared open-mouthed, or sagely nodded their heads.

"Then," Fleurette put in at last, "Madame and Mademoiselle have gone. Really—really gone?"

Mathieu nodded with another sigh, half of perplexity, half of woe.

"But whither?" Fleurette insisted. "How? Why?"

"God alone knows, Mam'zelle," papa averred. "He has spirited Madame and Mademoiselle away to save them from these brigands."

"Did anybody see them go?"

Men and maids shook their heads. No one had seen Madame or Mademoiselle go. Old Mathieu was the last to have seen the ladies. He had just begun to clear the table, when they rose, and, as was their custom, went through to the boudoir. Mathieu had opened the door for them. And now he came to think of it, the ladies had each kissed Monsieur very tenderly before they went out of the room. Yes! the kiss had seemed like a farewell. Mathieu shook his head dolefully; he remembered it now, but hadn't thought anything about it at the moment. Monsieur certainly appeared more thoughtful. Usually, while he drank his last glass of wine and Mathieu was engaged in washing the silver in the large copper bowl which he always brought into the room for that purpose, Monsieur would chat with him, talk over the gossip of the day. But to-night he had been unusually silent. Yes! Mathieu now remembered quite distinctly about the kiss, and about Monsieur being so silent. But he certainly had noticed nothing else unusual, until the moment when those brigands banged at the door and demanded admittance in the name of their godless Republic.

Mathieu was on the stairs at that moment, so he did not know how Monsieur had looked when he heard all the tramping and the noise. But Madame and Mademoiselle were gone, of that there could be no doubt. The brigands had searched for them, like so many dogs digging for a bone, and not a trace was there of the two ladies, for the *bon Dieu*, no doubt, had made them invisible.

Of old Mathieu and the staff, the officer in command took no notice, after he had summarily ordered them to muster up in the hall; he counted up the indoor-servants and the farm-hands; those who had their homes outside the precincts of the château, he ordered roughly out of the place.

"Get back to your homes!" he had said to them, after he had inspected and questioned them; "and stay there quietly, if you value your lives."

So there were only half a dozen old men, the four girls and the staff's cook left in the château. All of them were scared, and as Mam'zelle Fleurette could see, they just stood about and talked and talked while the girls did nothing but cry. He—Mathieu—could do nothing with any of them. The work of the house ought to be carried on; none of them had had any supper yet. But there! young and old, they were, all of them, too much upset to work or to eat; and the tramp-tramp-tramp, upstairs and downstairs was nerve-shattering to everybody.

Fleurette listened to the amazing story until the end. As Mathieu said, there was the ceaseless tramping of feet still going on. They—those horrible soldiers of the Republic, unworthy to be called Frenchmen—were still searching for Madame and Mademoiselle in order to drag them to Orange where the awful guillotine had been at work these months past; or perhaps even to Paris—that den of horrors beside which the stories of demons and ogres were but trivial tales.

Madame and Mademoiselle! who never in their lives had done any harm to anyone: but rather spent every hour of the day planning and executing kind deeds! And Mademoiselle! so delicate and frail that even her father, who idolized her, hardly dared touch her. And now these men, these rough and uncouth soldiers, with their harsh voices and bullying ways, to think of their approaching Mademoiselle, pushing her, dragging her, it made Fleurette's blood boil even to think of such a possibility. No wonder that the *bon Dieu* had made them invisible to the eyes of all those bandits.

Tramp! tramp! tramp! and now a loud banging as if pieces of furniture, chairs, tables were being overturned and then a crash, as of broken china!

"Holy Virgin!" Papa Mathieu exclaimed with a loud groan; "to think of Madame's beautiful things! Those brigands are furious at not finding Madame and Mademoiselle, and are venting their wrath on inanimate things."

It was these words of old Mathieu that sent Fleurette's thoughts flying in another direction—back to the early afternoon of this memorable day—back to the first visit of these awful soldiers, and to the faggot-carrier with his bundle tied up in sacking. From thence to the voice! The mysterious voice that had told her where valuables and papers were to be found. It was such a flash of recollection that her whole face became transfigured; anxiety and superstitious awe gave place to that same fervour which had animated her when she met the eyes of the faggot-carrier: eyes that conveyed a message, which at last she was beginning to understand.

"Papa!" she cried impulsively.

"Yes, Mam'zelle?" Mathieu asked with another sigh.

"Did anything else happen?—I mean anything unusual?—Did Madame—or Monsieur—receive a letter? a message? or—or did any other stranger come to the château this afternoon?

"Oh think, Papa Mathieu, think," she implored with tears of agitation choking her voice. "I cannot tell you how important it is. Try to remember—was there anything?—anybody?——"

Papa persistently shook his head, until Pierre, who was the gate-keeper, reminded him that Monsieur had gone down the avenue as far as the gate, just ten minutes before dinner was served.

"There's nothing very unusual in that," Mathieu retorted. "Monsieur is often out just before dinner is served."

"Yes!" Pierre insisted. "But what did he do this evening? He walked straight to the gate, which I had closed half an hour before. I saw him. He walked straight to the gate, he did, and you know the old acacia tree just the other side? Well! Monsieur put his foot on a bar of the gate and reached over to the forked branch of the old tree. I saw him quite plainly, I tell you. And when he walked back to the house he had a piece of paper in his hand with some writing on it, which he was reading. And I think, papa," Pierre concluded triumphantly, "you'll have to admit that there was something unusual in that."

But Mathieu, with the obstinacy of old age and long service, would not admit it, even now.

"Monsieur," he said, "met the mail-carrier at the gate, he often comes at this hour. He gave Monsieur a letter. Monsieur often gets letters——"

But here André interposed. Old André—they were all of them old—worked in the stables, and it was he who had taken the two horses from the soldiers when ordered to do so, and walked them round to the stables. It was then that he noticed two beggars hanging about in the yard: a man and a woman. He had peremptorily ordered them off the premises.

"Beggars!" Fleurette exclaimed eagerly. "What were they like?"

André said that as the sun was in his eyes he couldn't see them very well. There was a man and a woman. He was busy with the horses and upset by the arrival of all these brigands. The woman he couldn't see at all because of the shawl which covered her head, but he recollected that the man was a big fellow, bent nearly double under a huge bundle tied up in sacking.

"When I spoke to him," André went on, "he mumbled something or other, but I just told him to clear out, he and his woman; we'd enough of vagabonds, I said, in the place with all these soldiers."

"And did he go?" Fleurette asked.

"Yes. I must admit that he went off quite quietly after that. I did not think he meant any evil, because when he first caught sight of me he did not attempt to hide or to run away."

"If he had," André went on after a moment or two, "I would have been after him pretty quickly, and wanted to know what was in that big bundle."

He paused, a look of perplexity and of shamefacedness came over his wrinkled old face while he thoughtfully scratched his head: "Now I think of it," he said, "I ought to have inspected that bundle. It looked mighty heavy for faggots or for rags. Perhaps he had been up to no good after all—— And directly after I lost sight of him and his woman I saw a whole lot of faggots lying in a heap close by the stable door."

The other old men and the maids had gathered closer round André and Fleurette. This was the first they had heard of the old vagabond and his woman, and the bundle which appeared so heavy.

"You certainly ought to have inspected that bundle, André," Mathieu said sententiously. He felt that there was a chance of recapturing his dignity which seemed to have been slightly impaired through his argument with Pierre. He could reassert his authority at any rate by rebuking André. "It looks," he went on, "as if the old vagabond had brought a lot of faggots with him, then turned them out of the sacking and replaced them by God knows what valuables he may have stolen."

"I was so upset, you understand, papa!" André murmured ruefully.

"We were all of us upset, as you call it, André," papa rebuked sternly, "but that is no excuse for neglect of duty."

"Don't scold André, papa," Fleurette broke in excitedly. "My belief is that the old vagabond, as you call him, was a messenger from the Holy Virgin, sent on purpose to get Madame and Mademoiselle safely out of the way."

"Oh, Mam'zelle!"

"From the Holy Virgin!"

"Sainte Marie, mère de Dieu, priez pour nous!" came in chorus from the maids. Even the cook, an elderly woman, jealous of her own dignity, was unable to conceal her excitement. The old men shook their heads, looked wise and sceptical.

"What makes you say that, Mam'zelle Fleurette?" Mathieu asked in an awed whisper.

But Fleurette was silent now. Already she had repented of having said so much. Discretion would have been so much wiser. That was the worst of her: she always allowed her tongue to run away with her. She looked eagerly from one anxious face to the other: well she knew that the little she had said would be talked over and commented on and be made the subject of gossip until it reached the village and possibly even Serres and Sisteron; and God only knew what harm this might do to Madame and Mademoiselle. She bit the tip of her tongue hard just to punish it for having wagged too freely, and seized with a sudden impulse, which she found irresistible, she snatched up a candle from the table, and incontinently turned and fled out of the hall, leaving the others to gape and stare after her, to scratch their heads, and to conjecture.

Aye! and to gossip too.

8

SIR PERCY HITS BACK

Perquisitions in these days of Liberty, Fraternity and Equality were perhaps among the minor horrors that befell innocent and guilty alike, at the behest of tyrants more implacable than the Inquisitors of Mediæval Spain, more cruel than the Borgias: but they were terrible nevertheless. A perquisition meant, in most cases, the destruction of every household treasure, every family relic cherished through generations, it meant the wanton smashing of furniture and mirrors, the ripping up of valuable tapestries and of mattresses, the defacement of priceless pictures, it meant prying, hostile eyes thrust into receptacles, however secret, into private papers and even letters. Nothing was sacred to men deputed to insult and to offend, just as much as to search.

When Fleurette reached that part of the house which was occupied by the family, she was confronted by the wildest, the most heart-stirring confusion. The carpets had been torn off the floors, the furniture for the most part lay in broken heaps about the rooms, mirrors and pictures had been dragged off the walls, broken crockery and glass was scattered everywhere, intermingled with horsehair and other stuffing out of chairs and mattresses, whilst all the walls, the doors, the window-frames bore traces of rude handling with bayonet or the heel of a boot. Fleurette, wide-eyed and appalled, ran from room to room; the guttering tallow candle which she held threw flickering lights and grotesque shadows on the scattered objects about her, made them seem more weird, like the appurtenances of an abode of ghosts. Here in the pretty boudoir Mademoiselle's embroidery-frame lay smashed to tinder-wood with threads of the work still hanging to it, bits of rags, pathetic in their look of abandonment and desolation. There in the withdrawing-room, the beautiful satin-wood spinet with its painted panels and exquisite marqueterie was lying on its side, its body gaping like a gigantic wound, the strings emitting a final vibration like the last song of a dying swan.

From the direction of the dining-room came the incessant murmur of voices, but throughout the rest of the apartments, in the midst of all the wreckage, a silence reigned as of the grave. The place now was completely deserted. It seemed almost as if some terrible tornado had swept through these living-rooms: some implacable forces of nature rather than the hatred and cupidity of men. An earthquake could not have been more devastating, a fire more destructive.

And now in the midst of it all Fleurette came to a standstill, candle in hand: her breath came and went in quick short gasps, and her heart was beating furiously. The silence in this semi-darkness with those long, ghost-like shadows seemed to oppress her; the broken bits of beautiful things which she had known and loved ever since she remembered anything, gave her an awful feeling of desolation and a kind of foreboding of things, still worse, to come. It was instinct which had brought her to a halt here in this one room amongst the others. It was always known as Madame's room, for here Madame would always sit when she gave her orders to various members of the household, here that she would look through the household accounts whilst Fleurette and Rose, when they were still children, would sit in a corner of the sofa by the huge hearth, hand in hand, with a picture-book on their knees, silent like a pair of tiny white mice, waiting until Madame had finished her accounts, because then they would all go into the garden to gather flowers for the rooms, and fruit for dessert, or perhaps go down into the kitchen and learn how to dress a chicken for the table, or how best to mix a salad.

And Fleurette stood for a moment or two quite still, holding the candle high above her head, contemplating this wreckage. Then, having found a safe place on which to deposit the candle, she carefully closed the door which gave, like several others, on a long corridor that led to the main staircase at one end and to the service stairs at the other. The time had come to cease contemplation, to drive away superstitious fears and to act. Closing her eyes, Fleurette strove first of all to recapture pictures of long ago, to recreate the scenes enacted in this room, before this awful calamity had fallen on these people whom she loved so dearly. Memory was not rebellious. She could see the whole picture just as it had impressed itself on the tablets of her mind when she used to sit here as a child. There by the window Madame's desk used to stand. It was lying on its side now, the drawers wrenched open, the handles broken, papers, pen and sand scattered about; the ink had run out of the glass container and stained the beautiful old Aubusson carpet. But there Madame used to sit. Fleurette could almost see her now, at the desk. Her big household books open before her.

Writing, calculating, and putting her money by in a leather bag. And presently she would rise, pick up her bag and books and carry them across the room to a spot close to the wall, the other side of the hearth. Here she would come to a standstill, and putting her beautiful hand somewhere against the wall, she would turn to the two girls—they were mere children then—and smile at them in a mysterious way; and they would say solemnly: "Open Sesame!" just as they had heard in the tale of Ali Baba and the forty robbers, which Monsieur de Frontenac had often told them. As soon as they had said the magic words the wall would open like the entrance of the robber's cave in the tale of Ali Baba, disclosing a recess into which Madame would put her books and her bag of money. Then she would once more turn and give a sign to the children and they would say: "Close Sesame!" and the mysterious door would swing to again and no trace be left of the recess which lay hidden somewhere behind the panelled wall.

The whole of this picture stood out before Fleurette's mental vision in every detail; the exact spot where Madame used to stand, the way she put out her hand and touched the panelled wall. Carefully picking her way through the maze of broken furniture, Fleurette came to a halt on the very spot where she had so often seen Madame standing, with her books and money-bag in her arms. She put out her hand and touched the panel as Madame had done: all over the carved panel she put her hand, touching and pressing each bit of carving in its turn. Her heart was still beating wildly, but not in any way with fear. In fact she was surprised at herself for not being afraid. It was just the excitement of this wonderful adventure! She, Fleurette, who had seen nothing of the world beyond her own village of Laragne and an occasional glimpse at Sisteron, suddenly found herself guiding the destinies of people whom she loved—the messenger sent by the *bon Dieu* to help them in their need. There is no young human creature living who would not respond, heart and soul, to such a call, and Fleurette was of the South, a child of that romantic land of Dauphiné which had given so many of her heroic sons to strive and work for France.

And suddenly, as Fleurette pressed her finger on every piece of carved relief, one by one, she felt the centre of a dog-rose yield to the pressure. Softly, noiselessly, the panel swung outwards, and there in the recess were the familiar household books and the money-bag. Beside them lay a leather wallet and a small casket fitted with a brass lock. Without any hesitation Fleurette took the bag, the wallet and the casket, leaving the books where they were. Never for a moment did the thought occur to her that she might be discovered in what would be a highly-compromising position. She was too simple-minded, too innately honest to think that she might be suspected of theft.

Having stowed the wallet and the bag in the wide pockets of her kirtle and hidden the casket beneath her shawl, Fleurette picked her way back across the room. She left the mysterious recess open because she did not know how to close it, and did not want to waste any time in trying to find out. She found her way to the door and opened it, then she blew out the candle and finally peeped out into the corridor.

It was deserted. The lingering evening light, pale and ghostlike, came creeping in through the row of tall arched windows facing her. As everywhere else in the château, the corridor bore the melancholy traces of the soldiers' passage. It was the same devastation. The same wanton destruction was only too apparent in the torn carpet and the fragments of glass and broken sconces that littered the floor. Fleurette, turning her back on the direction of the main staircase, made her way to the back stairs which wound in a close spiral down to the service door.

Fleurette descended with quick, furtive steps, until, past the first curve of the spiral, the stairs were in total darkness. But she would have found her way all about the château blindfold, so well did she know its every nook and cranny. She came to the door and fumbled for the bolts. She had drawn one and taken off the chain, when she heard a measured tramp on the other side of the door. Steps were coming this way along the flagged path; a moment or two later they came to a halt close to the door. Fleurette hardly daring to breathe, listened. A voice said: "Did you go in there?"

"No, citizen," replied another, "not by this door. The bolts are fastened on the inside."

Something else was said which Fleurette did not catch, and the steps receded in the direction of the front of the house. She waited a minute or two longer, breathless and motionless, until she heard what she thought was the tramp of feet in the corridor above her. The soldiers had apparently been ordered to come round again, perhaps they would be coming down those stairs. To hesitate now might prove fatal. Fumbling once more in the gloom, Fleurette found the last bolt and drew it, and the next moment was out in the open. The back door gave on the yard. On the right were the stables, and facing the door, the riding-school and one or two sheds; on the left the kitchens and servants' quarters. In this direction too was the great archway and the main entrance into the house. Past the archway was the park and the avenue leading to the big gates.

After a moment's reflection Fleurette decided to avoid these main approaches: there was another way across the park, past the stable gate. Hugging the casket closely under her shawl, Fleurette set out in the direction of the stables. There was no one about and she felt comparatively safe. Night was now rapidly drawing in, and she fortunately had on a dark kirtle and dark worsted stockings. The air was very still and the waning moon not yet risen in the east. From far away came the sound of the bell of Laragne church. It struck eight. Fleurette felt a pang of anxiety. She had promised to be home before dark and Louise would be anxious and cross: and there was still something she wanted to do before she went home. Now she was past the stable door where, in a heap, just as old André had said, there lay a pile of faggots. The sight of them gave Fleurette a happy thrill. Was she not obeying the dictates of the mysterious voice which had spoken to her through the medium of the old faggot-carrier?

The next moment, a firm step resounded on the flagstones of the stables, and a second later a man appeared under the lintel of the door.

"Fleurette! what in God's name are you doing here?"

Smothering a startled cry, Fleurette turned and found herself face to face with her father. He was standing at the stable door; his hands were clasped behind his back, and he had a tricolour sash round his waist. Now women, young girls especially, those born and bred in outlying country districts, are credited with being stupid, silly in their fears, timorous like hens; and so no doubt would Fleurette have been in ordinary circumstances. She may not have been either clever or brave originally; she would perhaps have behaved in a silly, timorous fashion but for this one fact, that she knew that something terrible was happening to the Frontenacs whom she loved, and that she had been deputed by the *bon Dieu*, or merely by a human friend, to do something important for them. In order to do this she must keep her head; and trust any woman to keep her head if one she loves is in peril.

"What are you doing here, Fleurette?" Bibi reiterated rather sternly.

And Fleurette with a well-simulated nervous little laugh, retorted lightly:

"Why, Bibi chéri, I might retaliate. What are *you* doing here? I thought you were on your way to Paris."

"What are you doing here, Fleurette?" Bibi said once more, and Fleurette thought that his voice had never sounded so harsh before.

"But Bibi," Fleurette said simply, "I often come to see Madame and Mademoiselle. And after you left this afternoon I felt so lonely and sad, I thought I might seek Mademoiselle Rose for company."

"And have you seen her?"

"No. They told me Madame and Mademoiselle had gone."

"Who told you?"

"Papa Mathieu."

"What else did he tell you?"

"Only that there were soldiers come to the château; and that I'd better go home again—and so I'm going."

"He didn't tell you anything else?"

"No," Fleurette replied innocently. "Was there anything else to say?"

"No—er—no," Bibi rejoined. "Of course not. But Fleurette——"

"Yes, Bibi darling?"

"How often must I tell you that you must not talk of 'Madame' and 'Mademoiselle'? There are no Madames and Mademoiselles now; we are, all of us equally, citizens of France."

"Yes, Bibi," Fleurette rejoined demurely. "And I really, really am very careful when strangers are about. It doesn't matter what I say before you, does it, chéri Bibi?"

"No, no," Bibi muttered, seemingly without much conviction, and Fleurette then went on quickly:

"I must run home now, chéri Bibi, or Louise will be getting anxious. You are coming too, aren't you? Louise will get you such a lovely supper and then——"

"No, my little one," Bibi said. "I can't. Not to-night. I must be in Orange to-morrow."

"But Bibi——"

"Run along, child," Bibi broke in almost fiercely. "It's a dark night, and there are always vagabonds about."

"Ah well then, good night, Bibi," Fleurette murmured meekly.

"Good night, little one."

And suddenly Bibi put out his hand and grasped Fleurette by the wrist.

"Are you not going to kiss me, Fleurette?" he asked with oh! such a tone of sadness now in his voice.

It was a terrible moment. What a mercy that the darling had seized her left wrist rather than her right, because with her right hand Fleurette was hugging the small casket under her shawl. There were also the wallet and the money-bag in the pocket of her kirtle: oh! if Bibi should knock against them! Fortunately it was dark, and he could not see the bulge under her shawl. But, of course, she could not part from Bibi chéri without giving him a farewell kiss. He seemed sad and unhappy, and there was something about his whole manner that Fleurette did not understand.

At first, when he startled her by suddenly appearing at the stable door, she had not even tried to conjecture what he was doing here; she was too deeply absorbed in her own adventure for the moment to do more than vaguely wonder what part Bibi was playing in the tragic events that had wrought such desolation at the château. Bibi chéri, who worshipped his little Fleurette, who was always so kind, so gentle, a slave to every one of her whims; he must have been dragged into this horrible affair, was perhaps an innocent tool of those cruel people in Paris, who monopolized his time and kept him away from his home.

Indeed, she had no mistrust in him whatever; but her trust in him did not go the length of telling him about the casket, or the mysterious voice of the faggot-carrier; those were her own secrets, secrets too which concerned the Frontenacs for whom Bibi had never evinced a very great affection, and had even tried to dissuade Fleurette from having too much intercourse with them. It was in fact her love for Madame and Monsieur, and for Mademoiselle Rose, and Bibi's strange dislike of them, which had brought the only clouds in the sunshine of their affection.

But of this Fleurette was not thinking at the moment, her one thought was of her secret and how best to guard it. All the same she would not have denied Bibi chéri the kiss he asked for. She must take the risk, that was all, and once again trust to her wits. She allowed him to put his arms round her neck and held up her fresh young face for his kiss: she held the casket so carefully that he did not feel its sharp angles. All was well, for now she was free from his embrace, but still he had hold of her left hand, and drew her close to him.

"Fleurette, my little one," he said earnestly.

"Yes, Bibi."

"Do you know where the two Frontenac women have gone to?"

"No, Bibi, I do not," Fleurette was able to reply in all truthfulness, and looked her father straight in the eyes. "They were gone before I came."

"It is for their good that I ask you."

"I am sure it is, Bibi chéri, but really, really I do not know."

Bibi gave a quick, impatient sigh.

"Ah, well! good-bye, my Fleurette."

"Good night, Bibi."

At last she was free. With her left hand she blew a last kiss to Bibi, and then quickly sped across the yard. Her heart felt heavy, and there was an uncomfortable lump in her throat. For the first time she had been brought face to face with the realities of life. Hitherto she had lived in a kind of fairyland in which she was the carefully-tended and guarded queen, and Bibi the acknowledged king as well as slave. Everything in the world was perfect, and lovely and wonderful; the men and women in it—not only Bibi, but Louise, and M. Duflos the butcher, and M. Colombe the grocer, and—and M. Amédé—they were all kind and generous and gentle. But now cruelty and spite had come within her ken. An ugly ghoul called "hatred" had passed by hand in hand with his ugly brother "mistrust" and the latter had whispered something in her ear just now, which had caused her to shrink within herself when Bibi had kissed her, and to turn from him and to run away with a strange sense of relief.

She did not look back as she sped across the yard, and when she came to the small postern gate she was thankful to find it on the latch, so that she could slip out unseen.

9

SIR PERCY HITS BACK

Fleurette was too young, too ignorant for self-analysis. She could not have told you what had made her act in the way she did, nor what had caused her so to mistrust Bibi as not to share her precious secret with him. All she knew was that she had had a wild desire to get away from him.

A cart-track led from the postern gate across a couple of fields where it joined the main road; one or two isolated farm buildings belonging to M. de Frontenac, and the open fields on both sides, made the track fairly safe from foot-pads. The main road too which led through the village would be safer after dark, than the short cut over the mountains. Fleurette hastened along, hugging her treasures, hoping that she would not fall in with the soldiers on their return from the château.

The weather had not fulfilled the promise made by the beauty of the sunset: heavy clouds hung over the sky; only one or two streaks of pale lemon-coloured light, like great gashes through the leaden clouds, still lingered in the West. Through the gloom farm-sheds and isolated trees loomed out like great immobile giants, and, on the right, the dense mass of the avenue of acacias and elder and the great gates of the château.

Fleurette was already well on her way along the high-road and in sight of the first house of the village, the cottage where Adèle lived with her aunt, the widow Tronchet, when she heard the all too familiar sound behind her of the heavy tramping of feet and of horses' hoofs raising the dust of the road. The night was so still that the sounds reached her ears distinctly. She heard the lieutenant's harsh voice giving a brief word of command: the creaking of the château gates, as they swung upon their hinges. Just then Roy, Monsieur's dog, set up a dismal howl, and from one of the tall poplar-trees that bordered the road an owl gave a hoot and fluttered out into the night.

Fleurette broke out into a run. She knew that she could ask for shelter in the widow Tronchet's cottage and wait there until the soldiers had gone by. Perhaps Adèle would walk home with her after that. Fortunately she could already perceive the light glimmering in one of the tiny windows, and just at the moment Adèle came out of the front door, probably to see for herself what the unusual sounds were about.

She was mightily surprised to see Fleurette come running along.

"They are the same soldiers, Adèle," Fleurette explained breathlessly, as she followed her foster-sister into the cottage, "who were at Lou Mas this afternoon. Close the door, do, and I'll tell you all about them."

The widow Tronchet came out of her kitchen, and looked disapprovingly at Fleurette. She did not like the girl, and discouraged all intercourse between her and Adèle. She was a thrifty, hard-featured, hard-hearted peasant—older than her sister Louise by a couple of years—who had exacted every ounce of work and obedience from Adèle in payment for the shelter of her roof and for her daily bread. She had never forgiven her sister for leaving Adèle on her hands, though the girl had always worked her fingers to the bone, grudgingly no doubt, but diligently, in order to bring additional comfort into the cottage. But it was a poor, ill-furnished cottage, wherein food was none too plentiful, and beds hard, whereas Louise at Lou Mas lived in the lap of luxury; and envy had fostered dislike until it had almost become hatred.

She listened, with a frown on her hard wrinkled face, to Fleurette's breathless tale of what had happened at the château. It would be the gossip of the village by to-morrow, that the soldiers of the Republic had arrested Monsieur, and that Madame and Mademoiselle had fled no one knew whither.

"Oh, Ma'ame Tronchet," Fleurette concluded, her fresh voice hoarse with sobs, "dear Ma'ame Tronchet, you don't think they're really going to harm Monsieur, do you?"

The widow Tronchet shrugged her shoulders and gave a short, harsh laugh.

"I'm not thinking about it at all one way or the other," she said drily. "What difference does it make to us poor people," she went on, grumbling, while she busied herself about the room, "what happens to all those aristos? They never cared what happened to us."

For the moment Fleurette could do no more than stare at the widow Tronchet, in horror. Never had she heard anyone say anything so wicked. She was quite ready to defend Monsieur and Madame against any accusation of hard-heartedness, and would have done so at risk of offending the disagreeable, ill-natured old woman, but for the moment her attention, as well as that of Adèle's, was riveted on the sounds outside. The soldiers had just come round the bend of the road; they were quite close to the cottage already, with the two horsemen walking their mounts in the van.

"They are going on to Serres," Fleurette whispered. In her heart she was wondering what Bibi was going to do. He was evidently not going to Orange, as he had said he would. Would he spend the night at Lou Mas after all? If he did, was there any danger of Fleurette's secret leaking out? Of Bibi chéri finding out something about the casket and the precious wallet? Fleurette was still hugging the casket, she could see the widow Tronchet's hard, steely eyes, gazing curiously at the bulge underneath her shawl, and then at the fullness in her kirtle where the wallet and the money-bag lay hidden in the pockets: Fleurette felt the blood rush up to her cheeks, and then had the mortification of seeing Adèle's pinched-up little face break into a smile. Of what were those two women thinking? Surely not that she, Fleurette, had been stealing. Their faces were so inscrutable: the older woman's hard and set, and Adèle's rat-like and furtive, as if determined to conceal her thoughts.

The next moment they all heard the horsemen go by. Adèle ran to the door and peered out into the night. Over her shoulder she said to Fleurette:

"There's your father riding with the soldiers. Shall I shout to him and tell him you are here?"

Instinctively Fleurette shook her head, and with that same inscrutable smile still on her face, Adèle deliberately closed the door again.

"They've got Monsieur walking between them," she commented drily.

"It would have been better," the widow said acidly to Fleurette, "for Citizen Armand to know that you are here. It won't be safe for women to be alone on the high-road this night, I am thinking."

"Then, as Fleurette remained silent, debating within herself what she had best do, the old woman went on curtly: "The sooner you get home now, my girl, the better. Adèle has got to put in an hour's work at Citizen Colombe's up at the village; it is miserable pay enough," she continued muttering to herself, "and a shame that one girl should have to work so hard, whilst another lives a pampered life of luxury. But anyway," she concluded abruptly, "I can't be wasting any lamp-oil on you."

"No—no—of course not, Ma'ame Tronchet," Fleurette stammered. But the widow, still muttering under her breath, was paying no more attention to her. She had climbed on to a chair, and reaching up to the lamp that hung from the ceiling, she turned out the light. The room was now in darkness except for the light that came in through the open kitchen door. The widow with a curt: "Don't be late, Adèle," went off into the kitchen, and a moment or two later could be heard busy with her pots and pans.

Adèle had picked up her shawl, and equally unceremoniously gone as far as the door, when Fleurette called her shyly back.

"Adèle!"

The girl turned without speaking, her hand on the door which she was holding open.

"If you are going to M'sieur Colombe, could you ——" Fleurette stammered, "I mean, would you tell Monsieur Amédé, that—that I am here, and perhaps——"

"Why don't you come along with me?" Adèle retorted drily, "and tell him what you want."

Of course Fleurette could not tell her that she did not want Monsieur and Madame Colombe to know that she had something important to say to M'sieu' Amédé. So all she said was: "Oh, Adèle, please!"

Adèle retorted with a shrug of the shoulders and an ugly little sneer:

"You don't want his papa and mama to know, I suppose."

Fleurette whispered: "No!"

"Very well!" was all that Adèle said in reply. "I'll tell him."

And in her usual, furtive, noiseless way she went out of the house, closing the door behind her.

10

SIR PERCY HITS BACK

Fleurette remained in darkness, silent, motionless as a little mouse, listening for the well-known footstep which in a few minutes, she knew, would be at the door. It had perhaps been a rash thing thus to give herself away to Adèle, but the girl was uncommunicative and had never been known to gossip. Between two risks Fleurette had chosen the lesser one. If Bibi—as she feared—was going back to Lou Mas, there would be no chance whatever of keeping the secret of Madame's casket and valuables from him, and what Bibi's attitude would be towards them, Fleurette could not guess. It was the great Unknown. For Madame's sake and Mademoiselle's she would not risk it.

Like an inspiration the thought of M'sieur Amédé had occurred to her; of Amédé who, when she was a little girl and he a growing lad, would always take the blame on himself and know how to shield her when they had got into mischief together. She felt now, especially since this afternoon, that she could trust Amédé in a way that she had never trusted anyone else. Not even Bibi. Unfortunately Adèle had to be made a part confidant of the purpose: but after all what did Adèle know? She couldn't know anything about the casket and Madame's valuables: and if she did sneer, or even talk to her aunt about this message sent to M'sieu' Amédé through her, well! Fleurette was prepared to face the gossip—as long as her secret was safe.

She was counting the minutes—the seconds—— Five minutes for Adèle to go to the Rue Haute: three and a half for Amédé to run along here—she did not doubt but that he would run. Then there would be the intervening time whilst Adèle sought for an opportunity to speak to him alone. But oh! how Time dragged on leaden-footed! Nearly fifteen minutes must have gone by since Adèle went away. The widow Tronchet was still busy in the kitchen, rattling her pots and pans: but any moment she might finish and perhaps come in here and find

Fleurette still waiting. Then there would be more acrimonious remarks, questions, arguments—— Had Fleurette known anything about nerves, she would have said that hers were irritated to snapping-point; but there was little talk of nerves in that year, 1794, and none in this remote corner of Dauphiné.

Fleurette found it very difficult even to sit still. Would Amédé never come! All sorts of possibilities occurred to her, bringing her to the point of screaming with impatience. Perhaps he was from home, or working in the shop under his father's eye. Perhaps the soldiers had called at the *épicerie* and taken him away, and Fleurette would never see her again—— Oh! if only time would stand still until Amédé came!

Then at last, when she was on the point of bursting into tears with disappointment, she heard the quick, familiar step. Amédé!!! As noiselessly as possible she opened the door and slipped out. There, sure enough, was Amédé coming along. Though it was very dark now, Fleurette knew it was he because of the sound of his footsteps. Hearing hers, he came to a halt, and she ran up to him, breathless with excitement. All at once the enormity of what she had done struck terror in her heart. She, Fleurette, whose reputation had stood hitherto above all gossip, who for three years in succession had been crowned Queen of the month of May, an honour only accorded to girls of spotless character, she had actually given an assignation to a young man—at night—far from her home and his!

And with the horror of what she had done came an intense shyness. What would M'sieur Amédé himself think of her? Indeed, she had to evoke all her fondness for Madame and all her fears for Mademoiselle before she could summon enough courage to approach him, and to place a timid little hand upon his arm. She felt it trembling at her touch, and through the silence of the night came an answering timid sigh and whisper:

"Mam'zelle Fleurette! What can I do in your service?"

His timidity gave her courage. Gently she led him to the edge of the road where the tall poplar-trees cast long, impenetrable shadows.

"M'sieur Amédé," Fleurette began, whispering low so that chance eavesdroppers might not hear: "I don't know what you'll think of me. I know I have done something which every one in the village would call reprehensible. I sent for you in secret because —because, M'sieur Amédé, there is no one in the world I could trust, as I do trust you."

This time there came no sigh on the part of the young peasant, only a quick intaking of the breath, as if he had suddenly been dazzled by a wonderful light. His hard, rough hand crept up shyly and fastened over the soft, quivering one that lay upon his sleeve just like a frightened bird. But he was a man of few words, and therefore said nothing: and Fleurette, encouraged by the pressure of that rough hand, went on more glibly.

"It is about Monsieur, Madame and Mademoiselle," she said, "up at the château. Soldiers have visited the place and they have broken the furniture and torn the beautiful carpets and the curtains: why, I know not. They have also called Monsieur, Madame and Mademoiselle traitors and aristos, and they have seized Monsieur and dragged him away from his home. By a miracle, M'sieur Amédé, a miracle wrought by the bon Dieu himself, Madame and Mademoiselle were able to escape out of the château before those awful soldiers came. I know that they are safe, but——"

"How do you know that, Mam'zelle Fleurette?" Amédé asked also in a whisper.

"Because, M'sieur Amédé," she replied, "there is a mysterious personage working for the safety of Madame and Mademoiselle, under the direct guidance of the good God. I feel quite sure that Monsieur will also presently be saved through him."

"A mysterious personage, Mam'zelle Fleurette?"

"Yes, a direct messenger from Heaven. He has come down to earth in the guise of an old faggot-carrier. He looks old and decrepit and toil-worn, but when he speaks his voice is like that of an archangel, and if he looks at you his eyes give you the strength of giants and celestial joy."

"But, Mam'zelle Fleurette——"

"His voice spoke to me this afternoon, M'sieu' Amédé. All it said to me was that papers and valuables were behind the panel in Madame's room. At that time I knew nothing about the soldiers. I had seen them but did not know that they were going to the château to arrest Monsieur and Madame and Mademoiselle Rose. Nevertheless when that voice spoke to me, I felt I must go over to the château as quickly as may be."

"Why did you not send for me then, Mam'zelle Fleurette?"

"I seemed to be in a hurry, impelled to run along as fast as I could. So I went by the mountain track. When I arrived at the château, the soldiers had been there some time. They had turned the place topsy-turvy, scared the servants and smashed and torn up everything, leaving nothing but the walls intact. It seemed as if a great tempest had swept by and wrecked everything. Monsieur was under arrest and Madame and Mademoiselle had gone. No one knew whither. Then suddenly I remembered that mysterious voice: I found my way to Madame's room, and I found the panel, behind which Madame used to hide her household books and her money. I had often watched her doing this when I was a child. I tried to remember how to make the panel work and the good God helped me. And behind the panel I found Madame's papers and her money, and a small box which, I am sure, has precious things in it, or it would not have been there."

"Then what did you do, Mam'zelle Fleurette?" Amédé gasped under his breath, his none too sharp wits slowly taking in the details of the amazing adventure.

"I just took the wallet, M'sieu' Amédé," she replied simply, "and the money-bag, and the box. And here they are."

She tapped the pockets of her kirtle and made him feel the bulge underneath her shawl.

"Oh, mon Dieu!" he exclaimed fervently.

And then she told him about Bibi, and how frightened she was lest when she returned to Lou Mas she should find him there. Bibi's sympathies seemed to be all with the soldiers, she explained, and he would for certain make her give up Madame's papers and valuables to the lieutenant.

"That is why," she concluded with a return to her first timidity, "I wished to speak with you, dear M'sieu' Amédé."

"The Eternal Eve!" It was the first time Fleurette had used an endearing word when speaking to Amédé. Born and bred in this remote corner of Dauphiné, unsophisticated, untutored in the ways of coquetry and cajolery, she knew nevertheless, true daughter of the first mother that she was, that after this he would be mere wax in her hands.

He was!

All that he wanted to know was what he could do for her. Had she asked him to throw himself into the Buëche, he would have done it: but all that she wanted was for him to put her treasures in a safe place, until such time as Madame required them.

"If Bibi knew what I was doing, M'sieu' Amédé," she pleaded, "he would order me to give up Madame's property. But I know that the bon Dieu meant me to take charge of it, or why," she argued naïvely, "should He have sent His messenger to me?"

Of course Amédé was only too ready to share the burden of this wonderful secret with Fleurette.

It was wonderful to share anything with this loveliest being in all the world; and the thought that she trusted him more even than her father, was sending him wellnigh crazy with joy.

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Mam'zelle Fleurette," he said: "There's an old tool-shed at the back of our house where all sorts of rubbish are kept. It is an absolute litter now, and the back of it has not been cleared or interfered with for years. But I know of a convenient hole in the flooring, hidden well away in a corner. I'll put these things there. They'll be quite safe—Mam'zelle Fleurette, you'll know where to find them after I've gone away, if you want them."

"After you've gone away?"

For the moment she had forgotten. Of course he was going! How could she forget? He was going to join the army—to fight the English——! Perhaps he was never coming back—oh! How could she—how could she forget?

Amédé after the long speech which he had delivered in a whisper—his longest speech on record—had remained silent. The tone of anguish in Fleurette's voice, just now when he recalled the fact that he was going away, had given him an immense thrill of joy. Altogether poor Amédé felt so happy that he was almost ashamed. The night was so beautifully still: the wind had gone down, and slowly the great clouds that had obscured the sky since sunset were rolling away over the valley. Already overhead a patch of translucent indigo appeared, ever-widening, and revealing one by one the scintillating worlds that are beyond man's ken. Amédé did not want to speak; he wanted it less than he had ever done before. He just wanted to stand there beside this exquisite creature, wrapped in the silence of the night, feeling her nearness, hearing the gentle murmur of her breath come and go through her perfect mouth. She had extracted the casket from under her shawl and given it to him to hold, and she also gave him the wallet and the money-bag; and as she did this, her little hand, so soft and so warm, came in contact with his now and then—quite often—and poor Amédé was on the point of swooning with delight.

"I do trust you, M'sieu' Amédé," she whispered in the end: "and you'll do this for Madame's sake, will you not? and also Mademoiselle's. And also," she added softly, "for mine."

"Oh! Mam'zelle Fleurette," Amédé sighed. What he had wished to say was: "I would die for you, beloved of my heart: at a word from you I would lay down my life, or barter my soul." But Amédé had no command of words, and was now cursing himself for being a clumsy fool. He stowed away the wallet and the bag into the pockets of his breeches, and tucked the casket underneath his blouse.

"And now I must go home, dear Monsieur Amédé," Fleurette said. "As it is, I am afraid Bibi will be anxious."

Her hand was on his arm: and with a sudden impulse he stooped and pressed his lips against that exquisite little hand. Fortunately they were still standing in the shadows cast by the poplar-trees, or Amédé must have seen the blush that rose to Fleurette's cheeks when she felt the delicious thrill of that timid kiss. A soft breeze stirred the branches above their heads, and through the quivering leaves there came a sigh that was like an echo of their own. And above the crests of Pelvoux the waning moon suddenly rent the last clouds that veiled her mystery, and flooded the snowy immensities with a shower of gold. Slowly the shades of night yielded to the magic, and the high-road glistened like a silvery ribbon winding, snake-like, toward Laragne.

Fleurette gave a sudden start of alarm.

"What is it, Mam'zelle Fleurette," Amédé asked.

"Some one," she said. "I saw some one move there—furtively—among the shadows."

He turned to look. A small figure wrapped in a shawl had just gone past on the other side of the road.

"It is only Adèle," he said carelessly. "She is going home."

Not altogether reassured, Fleurette peered into the shadows. She did not think that it was Adèle whom she had seen, or, if it was Adèle, there was some one else lurking in the shadows, she felt sure: and though she was not altogether frightened, she felt herself trembling, and her knees giving way under her.

No doubt it was in order to save herself from falling that she had leaned more heavily against Amédé's arm. Certain it is that he put that arm round her, only in order to support her; but the contact of that warm, quivering young body against his breast sent the last shred of his self-control flying away on the evening breeze.

The high-road was bathed in honey-coloured light, but these two were standing in the deep shadows cast by the poplar-trees; and the darkness wrapped them round as in a velvety, downy blanket. His arm tightened round her shoulders, pressed her closer and closer to his breast, held her there so closely that she could scarcely breathe.

It was only in order to get her breath that she raised her face to his; far be it from me to suggest that it was for any other motive; but this proved the final undoing of poor M'sieu' Amédé; for the next moment his lips were fastened hungrily on hers, and her sweet young soul went out to him, in a first, a most delicious kiss.

11

It all seemed like a lovely dream after that: this walking together arm in arm down the high-road with the waning moon throwing great patches of silvery light to guide them on their way.

They went through the village, not caring whom they met. They belonged to each other now; that wonderful kiss was a bond between them that only death could sever. That was how they felt; supremely, marvellously happy, thrilled with this new delight, this undreamed joy: and with it all a cloud of measureless sorrow at the impending farewell. The magic words had been spoken: "You love me, Fleurette?" The eternal question to which the only answer is a sigh. No, they did not care whom they met. They could laugh at gossip now: from this night they were tokened to one another, and only M. le Curé's blessing could make their happiness more complete.

As a matter of fact they met no one, for they avoided the main street of the village and made their way to Lou Mas along narrow by-paths that meandered through orchards of almond-trees heavy with blossom. For the most part they were silent. Fleurette's little hand rested on Amédé's arm. Now and then he gave that hand a quick, excited squeeze and this relieved his feelings for the time being. Under his other arm he hugged the casket, the precious treasure that had been the mute but main spring of his happiness. It represented Fleurette's trust in him: that priceless guerdon he would not have bartered for a kingdom.

"You will not part with Madame's valuables, will you, Amédé?" she had enjoined him most solemnly. "Not to anyone?"

"Never, Fleurette," he had replied solemnly. "On my soul!"

When they were within sight of Lou Mas, they decided that it would be best for him to turn back. She, Fleurette, was quite safe now, and of course old Louise would be waiting for her—and perhaps Bibi. She was not going to make a secret of her walk home with Amédé. Indeed she wished it proclaimed from the house-tops that they were tokened to one another, and that they would be married as soon as this horrible war was over. There was to be no secret about it, and Fleurette knew well enough that neither Bibi nor M'sieu' Colombe would object; but because of Madame's valuables, she did not want Amédé to come to Lou Mas until to-morrow. And so that first wonderful kiss found its successor in another—one that was perhaps even more delicious, because it was more poignant—the precursor of the last farewell.

Fleurette found Louise anxiously waiting for her. Bibi had not returned and the old woman knew nothing, of course, of the tragic events that had occurred at the château. Fleurette told her what had happened, and while she was speaking Bibi came in. He looked tired and anxious, but Fleurette thought it prudent not to appear to notice anything unusual about him. He made no reference to the events at Frontenac, and when nine o'clock came he kissed Fleurette as tenderly, as unconcernedly as usual. Nine o'clock! What a lifetime, as far as Fleurette was concerned, had been crowded into this past hour!

She went to bed as in a dream, partly made up of sorrow and partly of great joy: even the excitement of her adventure at the château was lost in the immensity of that joy. Fleurette fell asleep with her cheek against the hand on which Amédé had planted that first timid kiss.

When she came down in the early morning Bibi had already gone.

12

The soldiers of the Republic together with their officer had spent half the night at Laragne in the tavern kept by the Père Gramme, drinking and jesting with the drabs of the village. Each man had a tale to tell of his own prowess at the château, and how but for him, the ci-devant Frontenac would have slipped through the fingers of justice as readily as the two women had done.

They were very proud of their prisoner, who sat lonely and silent in a corner of the low-raftered room, foul with the odour of sour wine and perspiring humanity. Monsieur de Frontenac—the ci-devant as he was curtly termed—was apparently taking his misfortune calmly; neither threats nor vain promises caused him to depart from his attitude of quiet philosophy. The soldiers had, of course, made up their minds that he knew well enough where his wife and daughter were in hiding, but they had also realized by now that it was not in their power to force him to divulge what he knew.

The lieutenant—a man who had begun life as a notary's clerk, and therefore had some education—was content to shrug his shoulders and to declare that the citizens of the nearest Committee of Public Safety, had plenty of means at their disposal for making an obdurate prisoner speak. He recalled that at the trial of the Widow Capet she had been forced into admissions which, before that, she would sooner have died than make. Mocking glances, jeers and insults were thereupon cast on the prisoner who remained as unconcerned, as serene as before.

The lieutenant had commandeered billets for his men in the better houses of the village, and just before midnight the party broke up. The prisoner was then conducted to the small, local *poste de gendarmerie* and there incarcerated in the cell usually occupied by vagabonds and cattle-thieves. Two or three of the soldiers remained at the *poste* to reinforce the local gendarmes, in case some hot-heads in the village meditated a coup to wrest the traitor Frontenac from the clutches of justice. The lieutenant himself had selected the house of Citizen Colombe the grocer of the Rue Haute for his night-quarters. To say that the worthy *épicier* did not accord this representative of his country's army a warm welcome, would be to put it mildly. He was furious, and showed it as plainly as he dared; but there is in every French peasant a sound vein of common sense, and he knows—none better—when submission to the ruling powers is not only the best policy, but at the same time the most conducive to the preservation of his own dignity.

Ma'ame Colombe—or rather the citizeness—made the lieutenant comfortable and that was all; but at the bottom of her heart she felt that she must do unto him as she would wish her own son to be done by presently, when he too was a soldier in that army which she detested. She fell asleep thinking of Amédé tramping the high-road as these men had done, stockingless, hatless, with unwashed shirt and a dirty worsted cap on his head; and she dreamed all night of him, deprived even of his weekly bath in the big tub, over in the wash-house. That is what she objected to mostly in these men: the dirt. It was wonderful, of course, their fighting for their country, now that all the other countries in the world were attacking France, but Ma'ame Colombe argued to herself that patriotism might just as well be allied to cleanliness. Even the lieutenant, who was after all an officer, and should be setting a good example to his men, would have looked much more imposing if he had washed his face and taken the dust of the road out of his hair.

Great, therefore, was Ma'ame Colombe's astonishment the next morning when she, along with several of her friends, being at the market, saw another detachment of soldiers marching into Laragne from the direction of Sisteron. Only eight of them there were, with one officer and a wagon drawn by two splendid horses; but *nom du ciel*! what a different set of men and horses these were. The men clean as new pins, magnificently dressed in blue coats with white facings and belts, white breeches—all spotless—and black gaiters that reached midway up their thighs. Beneath their elegant *chapeau-bras*, each adorned with a silk tricolour cockade, they wore their own hair, down to their shoulders, unfettered by the old, ridiculous *queue*, and each man had successfully cultivated a fierce and magnificent moustache. Everything about them glistened with cleanliness, their boots, their buckles, their muskets; as for the officer, never in all their lives had the good ladies of Laragne seen anyone so magnificent: tall, blond, with a moustache that he could easily have tucked behind his ears, and a little tuft of blond beard at the tip of his chin, he walked with drawn sword at the head of his squad, a superb tricolour sash further enhancing the glory of his attire.

Potatoes and eggs and butter were forgotten, while market-women and customers stood gaping, open mouthed. Never had such beautiful specimens of manhood been seen in Laragne. By the time they reached the Rue Haute all the village had turned out to have a look at them, and heads appeared at every cottage window. The village urchins followed the little squad, intoning the "Marseillaise" and giving vent to their excitement by performing miracles of acrobatic evolutions. Even Ma'ame Colombe, who was at the moment selecting a piece of meat for Sunday's dinner, could not help but say to herself that she would not mind Amédé being in the army if he was going to look like that!

At that very moment one of the urchins paused in the midst of a magnificently sketched somersault in order to run down the street and back to the market-place, shouting excitedly:

"Ma'ame Colombe! Ma'ame Colombe! the soldiers are at the épicerie."

And so they were! Ma'ame Colombe hastily straightened her cap and snatching up her market basket, ran to the corner of the Rue Haute just in time to see the soldiers with their officer and wagon come to a halt outside her front door. The worthy Hector with his son Amédé, and the old man who helped in the shop, were busy taking down the shutters and displaying the sacks of various kinds of haricots and lentils in tempting array all along the shop front. Ma'ame Colombe heard the magnificent officer give a quick order: "Halte!" and "Attention!" and the next moment she saw him enter the shop followed by his men, the wagon remaining drawn up a little further down the street. The urchins and gaffers crowded round the doorstep open-mouthed, and Ma'ame Colombe had some difficulty in pushing her way through into her own house.

The officer began by asking Hector Colombe how many soldiers of the Republic were still sleeping under his roof.

"Only the lieutenant and two men, M'sieu' l'officier," Hector replied. Whereupon the officer broke in curtly:

"Call me citizen captain. This is the army of the Revolution and its soldiers are not aristos meseems."

Which remark boded no good to Ma'ame Colombe's ears. Clean or dirty they all appeared to be the same type of brigands; overbearing, exacting and merciless! Ah that poor dear Amédé!

The officer then demanded to see the lieutenant and the two soldiers. Amédé offered to call them, but was stopped by a brief command from the captain:

"No, not you," he said curtly, "I want you here, the citizeness can go."

Ma'ame Colombe, obedient and vaguely frightened, put down her basket and went upstairs to fetch the lieutenant and the two men, who were still in bed. But although she had only been gone a couple of minutes, her sense of fear took on a more tangible form when she came down again, for she found all the drawers of the counter open, and much of their contents scattered about the floor. Some of the soldiers were busy ferreting about, behind and under the counter. The officer stood in the middle of the shop talking with Hector, who looked both choleric and sullen; in the doorway, the crowd of gaffers were being kept back by two of the soldiers, who were using the butts of their muskets when some venturesome urchin tried to cross the threshold. But what filled poor Ma'ame Colombe's heart with dismay was the sight of Amédé sitting in the parlour behind the shop, with two other soldiers obviously on guard over him.

Her instinct prompted her to run first of all to her husband with a quick whispered: "Hector, what does this mean?"

But the magnificent officer brusquely thrust himself between her and Hector and said gruffly: "It means, citizeness, that not only treason, but also theft has been traced to this house, and that it is lucky for you that news of it reached the Committee of Sisteron in time, else," he added grimly, "it had been worse for you and your family."

"Treason and theft?" Ma'ame Colombe exclaimed in hot indignation. "You must take it from me, young man, citizen, captain, or whatever you may be, that I'll allow no one to——"

"Hold your tongue, woman," the officer broke in curtly; "you do yourself no good by these protests. Obedience is your wisest course."

"Good or no good," Ma'ame Colombe persisted heatedly, "I won't have the word theft used in connection with this house, and if——"

"Make your wife hold her tongue, citizen," the officer, now addressing Hector once more, broke in curtly, "or I shall have to send her to the poste for interfering with a soldier of the Republic in the execution of his duty."

Poor Hector Colombe, whose choler was shrinking in inverse ratio to that of his wife, did his best to pacify the worthy dame.

"It is all a mistake, Angélique," he said gently. "M'sieu' le Capitaine—pardon! the citizen captain thinks that Amédé has some papers and valuables belonging to Madame—I mean, to the Citizeness Frontenac——"

"Are they calling my Amédé a thief, then?" Ma'ame Colombe demanded hotly.

"No! No!" Hector replied, trying to be patient and conciliatory. "Have I not told you that it is all a mistake? Every one knows there are no thieves in this house; but it seems the authorities think that Amédé may have hidden those valuables pour le bon motif."

"If he had," the mother retorted obstinately, "he would say so. Let me just ask him——"

Hector had hold of her hand, but she wrenched it free, and before any of the soldiers could bar the way, she had run into the back parlour, shouting:

"Amédé, my little one, have you told those soldiers that you know nothing of Madame's valuables? Why, nom de Dieu!" she went on, hands on hips, defiant and aggressive like the true female defending its young, "look at the innocent. Is that the face of a thief?"

She pointed at Amédé, who, however, remained strangely silent.

"Voyons, mon petit, tell them!" Angélique Colombe went on with perhaps a shade less assurance than she had displayed at first. The next moment, however, the captain had seized her unceremoniously by the arm, and dragged her back into the front shop. Here he gave her arm a good shake.

"Did I not order you to hold your tongue?" he demanded roughly.

Cowed, in spite of herself, not so much by the officer's tone of command as by Amédé's silence, Ma'ame Colombe did, in effect, hold her tongue. A sense of disaster as well as of shame had suddenly descended upon her. Her ample bosom heaving, she sank into a chair, and threw her apron over her head. She was not crying, but she felt the need of shutting out from her vision the picture of Amédé looking so confused and sullen, of Hector looking as perplexed as she was herself, as well as of that magnificent officer with his fine clothes and his tricolour sash. But chiefly she wanted for the moment to lose sight of that crowd of gaffers and urchins and neighbours, all staring at her, with that unexplainable feeling, not exactly of contentment for her misfortune, but which can only be expressed by that untranslatable word *Schadenfreude*. Thus shut out from the rest of her little world, the poor woman slowly rocked herself backwards and forwards, murmuring inaudible words under cover of her apron, until she heard the captain's voice saying abruptly:

"Were you the officer in charge of detachment number ninety-seven?"

Curiosity got the better of sorrow, and Ma'ame Colombe peeped round the edge of her apron. The picture which she saw made her drop her apron altogether. The lieutenant who, the night before, had been so overbearing and so hilarious, stood before his superior officer now, a humble, dejected figure, dreading reprimand, like a schoolboy fearing the cane.

"I am in charge of the detachment ninety-seven—yes, citizen captain," he replied haltingly.

What a contrast these two! Ma'ame Colombe, in spite of her anxiety, her indignation and what not, could not help but compare. Woman-like, she had an eye for the handsome male, and what more gorgeous than this captain of the Republican, or revolutionary army, as he apparently liked to style his men, with his braided jacket and superb tricolour sash, with his blond hair and fierce moustachios? He poked his tufted chin out at the bedraggled-looking lieutenant before him, looked down with obvious contempt at the latter's ragged coat and mud-stained breeches. But he made no remark on the want of cleanliness and decency, as Ma'ame Colombe expected him to do.

"Where do you come from?" he demanded.

"From Orange, citizen captain."

"What is your objective?"

"After this, Serres, citizen captain, and then Valence."

"And your orders are to arrest on the way every person suspected of treason against the Republic?"

"Yes, citizen."

"And how have you obeyed these orders, citizen lieutenant?" the captain demanded sternly.

"I have done my best, citizen captain," the other replied with an attempt at bluster; "at Vaison——"

"I am not talking of Vaison, which you know quite well, citizen lieutenant. I wish to know how you obeyed the orders given to you to arrest the ci-devant Frontenac, his wife and daughter?"

"Citizen——"

"Have you done it, citizen lieutenant?" the officer thundered, and all of the bluster went out of the subaltern as he stammered meekly:

"When we reached the house of the ci-devant Frontenac, the two women had gone."

"Gone?" and the captain's voice boomed through the low-raftered room like a distant roll of cannon. "Gone? Whither?"

"Gone, citizen captain," the lieutenant murmured under his breath: "spirited away. The devil alone knows how."

"Which means that there is a traitor among you."

"Citizen captain——" the other protested.

"A traitor I say. You had secret orders, and yet the women were warned!" And once more the officer's glance flashed down with scorn on his unfortunate subordinate. His blond hair seemed to bristle with wrath; his moustachios stood out like spikes: he looked a veritable god of vengeance and of wrath.

"Where," he thundered, "is the ci-devant Frontenac?"

"At the commissariat, citizen captain, guarded by our men," the lieutenant replied.

"And the rest of your detachment?"

"In billets in the village."

"And did you search this house when you entered it?"

"No—that is—no—I did not—that is——" stammered the wretched man.

"Or the other houses where you billeted your men?"

But this time the lieutenant only shook his head in dejected silence.

"Which means that you allowed soldiers of the Republic to sleep under strange roofs without ascertaining whether they were safe. Why, citizen lieutenant, this place might have been swarming with traitors."

"The people here, citizen, are——"

"Enough. You are relieved of your command, and you will proceed now with us to Sisteron where you will render an account of your conduct before the Committee of Public Safety."

Ma'ame Colombe, who had watched the two men closely during this exciting colloquy, saw an ashen hue spread over the lieutenant's face, beneath the thick coating of grime. Though they did not know much in this tucked-away corner of Dauphiné, of what went on in the great cities, they had vaguely heard how great officers of the army had been deprived of their rank and sent to the guillotine for not doing their duty by the army of the Republic. The crowd at the door had also listened in silence; many a cheek turned pale at sound of that thundering voice which held in its arrogant tone a menace of death.

And now the captain turned to the other two down-at-heel soldiers who stood skulking behind their lieutenant.

"Go," he commanded, "round the billets where your comrades are. Bring them hither. And one of you to the commissariat, and bring the ci-devant here too. And no delay, remember. No gossip on the way as you value your lives. I give you five minutes to have all the men and the prisoner here."

The men went immediately to execute the peremptory order, while the lieutenant remained in the shop looking the picture of humility and dejection. Ma'ame Colombe who had a kindly heart inside her ample bosom, felt almost sorry for the man, so miserable did he look. Indeed, it seemed as if this squad of elegantly clad soldiers sowed anguish and terror in their path.

But the worst was yet to come. Ma'ame Colombe thought that she had probed the last depths of humiliation when she heard that gorgeous officer call her Amédé a thief. To such a pass had this so-called revolution brought the respectable children of France, that they saw themselves bullied and insulted, and held up to shame before their neighbours. What was all that in comparison with the shame of seeing Amédé confronted with the proof that in very truth he was in possession of papers and valuables which were the property of Madame de Frontenac?

It all happened so quickly. Poor Ma'ame Colombe could scarce believe her eyes. All that she saw was two soldiers guided by their sumptuous captain go straight through the back parlour and out by the back door into the yard. What happened out there she did not know, but a minute or two later the three men were standing once more in the parlour, and the captain had in his hand a small box, a thick leather wallet and a bag which obviously contained money.

At sight of these Amédé—her Amédé—had jumped to his feet as if he had been stung; all the blood rushed to his face, and made it crimson with choler, and it looked for the moment as if he would hurl himself on the officer of the Republican army—which would have meant instant death for him, as the soldiers had already shouldered their muskets. Ma'ame Colombe gave a terrified shriek, whereat Amédé suddenly seemed to realize his position, the flush died out of his poor face, and with eyes downcast he resumed his former silent, constrained attitude.

The captain shrugged his shoulders and with a note of dry sarcasm in his voice he said:

"I see you make no attempt at denial. You are wise, citizen. Try and induce your mother not to shriek and you'll find that everything will turn out for the best."

He did not say this unkindly, and poor Ma'ame Colombe even thought that she detected an indulgent tone in his voice. She rose to her feet and put her podgy hands together, and when the captain re-entered the shop she looked up at him with tearful, entreating eyes.

"He did it with a good motive, M'sieu' le—I mean citizen captain. Look at the innocent. He is no thief. I swear he is no thief. I'd like," she went on, turning fiercely round and darting defiant glances on the crowd of gaffers on the doorstep, "I'd like to see the man who dared to say that my Amédé is a thief."

The officer had handed the *pièces de conviction* to one of his men, with orders to put them in the wagon. Then he commanded Amédé to stand up before him.

"Thief or no thief," he said drily, "you are guilty of having acted contrary to the interests of the Republic. You know what that means?"

Amédé made no reply, only hung his head, and twiddled his hot fingers together.

"It means," the officer continued, "that but for one thing, your life would have had to answer for this act of treason."

A groan went round the crowd on whose ears those words had fallen like the toll of a passing bell. But Ma'ame Colombe did not utter a sound. She clung to her Hector and the two old people stood there hand in hand, striving by this loving contact to conquer the icy fear that had gripped their hearts.

"The one thing that will probably save you," the officer resumed after a dramatic pause, "is that the Republic has need of you in her revolutionary army. The enemy is at the gates of France, you are young, healthy, vigorous; it is for you to show your mettle by defending your country. Thus you will redeem the past. For the moment it is my duty to take you before the Committee of Public Safety, whose final word will dispose of your fate."

He spoke loudly so that all the listeners might hear. Gaffers and urchins and market-women hardly dared to breathe. They felt awed, and could only gaze at one another, as if trying to read each other's thoughts. And while awed whispers still went the round, the down-at-heel soldiers, who had spent the night in the village, came skulking back in groups of two or threes. They pushed their way through the crowd into the shop. One of the last to arrive was M. de Frontenac, closely guarded by two of the men.

And there they all stood now in the shop, a dozen or so of them, beside the sacks of haricots and button-onions and split peas; all of them with the exception of the prisoner, looking dirty and bedraggled, with their worsted caps covered in dust, bits of hay and straw clinging to their coats and to their hair, bare-legged and grimy-faced, the steel of their bayonets dull with sludge, their breeches mud-stained. Such a contrast to their superb officer and his splendidly attired squad. And they could hear the women drawing humiliating comparisons, tittering and pointing fingers of scorn at them, whilst even the drabs, with whom they had drunk and jested the night before, turned contemptuous shoulders upon them now.

And thus they were mustered before the magnificent captain; all soldiers together, shoulder to shoulder, the down-at-heel and the grandees—aristos one would have called them, only that they were of the revolutionary army, which set out to exterminate the very last of the aristocracy, the hated tyrants and dissolute brood. And while they stood there, under the eye of the officer, the crowd outside watched them, and instinctively something of the spirit that animated the rest of France, swept like a poisonous sirocco over these worthy villagers of Laragne; the same spirit that in the great cities sent old women knitting and gossiping at the foot of the guillotine and that prompted young girls to dip their kerchiefs in the blood of its victims. A poisonous wind like the breath of demons! Some of the men and women had been to Sisteron and heard the hymn of hate, the *Carmagnole*! "Ça ira! Ça ira! Les aristos à la lanterne!" One or two of them began to hum it, stamping their feet to its rhythm.

Gradually the song swelled, one after another they took up the tune, these village men and maids who, unbeknown even to themselves had absorbed some of the insidious poison of hatred and black envy.

"Right! Turn!" the captain commanded, and marking time with their feet, the little squad now over twenty strong, started on its way. Ma'ame Colombe, now loudly moaning, still clung to her boy. He was very brave and tried to reassure and to comfort her. Anyway, he would have had to go to-day, he argued, his orders were to report himself at Serres, to be drafted into the army. From the officer's attitude it certainly seemed as if nothing more terrifying was to happen to him. The boy was brave enough too not to let his mother know how doubly his heart ached, because he was saying good-bye to his home, and could not say good-bye to Fleurette. His heart was filled with the image of Fleurette, but he would not add to his mother's sorrow by speaking to her of his own. He was just an unsophisticated village lad, knowing little, understanding less. His own life and comfort were nothing to him, beside the sorrow which his mother felt and which, he knew, would bring such countless tears in Fleurette's lovely blue eyes. The father too tried to be brave; the effort to keep back his tears brought the perspiration streaming down his round, kindly face. When the crowd—his friends and neighbours some of them—intoned the revolutionary song, his powerful fist was clenched, but he did not shake it at the singers. His sound common sense had come again to his rescue, and whispered to him that for Amédé's sake, quiet submission was the soundest policy.

While mother and son clung to one another in a last farewell, Hector contrived to approach M. de Frontenac who, alone in the midst of such excitement and such conflicting emotions, had remained perfectly calm. The casual observer, not knowing him, might have thought that the fate of his wife and daughter, his separation from them, and the blow that destiny had dealt to these worthy folk here, whom he had known all his life, had left him completely indifferent. He had spent the night in a prison cell, under the eye of men—the local gendarmes—whose welfare and whose families had been his care for years; but seemingly he had slept peacefully. At any rate his face showed no sign of fatigue, or his eyes of sleeplessness. He had dressed with scrupulous care; his well-worn clothes, the ones he was wearing at dinner when the soldiers made irruption into the château, were clean and tidily put on; his cravat neatly tied, his hair smooth. When Hector Colombe approached him, he gripped the worthy *épicier* warmly by the hand.

And now the crowd parted to allow the soldiers to pass. Some of the girls tried to ogle the handsome ones and to leer at the others, but no one attempted to do more than stare in awe and admiration at the magnificent officer. The two prisoners were ordered to mount into the wagon; one of the soldiers took the reins and the next moment the order, "Quick March!" was given.

The crowd broke into an excited "Hurrah!" and the little squad slowly moved off, officer *en tête*, and the wagon in the rear, in the direction of Sisteron.

Then one of the villagers once more struck up the *Carmagnole*, and the crowd took it up. "Ça ira! ça ira!" they sang gaily, and the men took the girls by the waist and twirled them round in a gay rigadoon. Old men and young girls; for there were no young men in the villages of France these days, when the army claimed them all, they danced and twirled in the wake of the retreating squad, and around them bare-footed urchins somersaulted along in the cloud of dust raised by the horses and wagon.

And that was the picture that Amédé Colombe and Charles de Frontenac, sitting side by side in the wagon, saw gradually receding before their eyes as they were driven away, prisoners from their homes.

13

SIR PERCY HITS BACK

BUT in Lou Mas nothing was known of the tragic events that were occurring at Laragne. Old Louise and Fleurette were busy with housework, and if Fleurette went about the house, silent and wistful, it was because presently she would have to say the inevitable farewell to Amédé.

It was Adèle who brought the news. Young Colombe had been arrested by soldiers of the revolutionary army, she said, and he and M'sieu' de Frontenac had been taken to Sisteron. A superior officer of the army had come in this morning and relieved the lieutenant of his command. There had been great excitement in Laragne owing to the arrival of this new detachment of soldiers who were as splendid as those of last night had been travel-stained and bedraggled. The whole of the squad, headed by that magnificent officer, had marched away in the direction of Sisteron, the two prisoners sitting in the wagon in the rear.

It was only bit by bit that old Louise succeeded in dragging all this news out of Adèle. The girl's habitual reticence was put to a severe test by all the the questions and cross-questions, whilst Fleurette stood by wide-eyed, distraught with the idea of these horrible complications in which her poor Amédé was being involved. But she would not show any emotion before Adèle, she felt vaguely that her foster-sister, never very expansive towards her, had suddenly become almost inimical. So she waited until Louise had extracted all the news she could out of the taciturn girl, and curtly ordered her back into the kitchen; then as the old woman was about to follow, Fleurette caught her by the hand.

"Louise," she said in a tone of almost desperate entreaty, "dear, kind Louise, I must go to Sisteron—at once."

"To Sisteron?" old Louise exclaimed, frowning. "Heavens alive, what is the child thinking of now?"

"Of M'sieu' Amédé, dear Louise," Fleurette replied. "You heard what Adèle said. They have taken him to Sisteron."

"And what of it?" Louise asked—but she asked for form's sake only, she knew quite well what was going on in Fleurette's head.

"Only this, dear Louise," the girl said with a little note of defiance piercing through her shyness. "We—that is Amédé and I—are tokened to one another."

"Tokened?" the old woman exclaimed with a gasp. "Since when?"

"Since last night."

"And without your father's consent? Well! of all the——"

"Chéri Bibi would approve," Fleurette asserted, "if he knew."

Old Louise shrugged her shoulders. She would not trust herself to speak because the child looked so sweet and so innocent, and her pretty blue eyes were so full of tears, that Louise felt an almost unconquerable desire to take hold of her and hug her to her breast. Which act of weakness would have seriously impaired her authority at this critical juncture. She was wondering what to say next—for in truth she more than suspected that the child was right, and that Citizen Armand would not object to those two young things being tokened to one another, when Fleurette broke in gently:

"So you see, dear, kind Louise, that I must go to Sisteron—now—at once."

"But Holy Virgin, what to do?"

"To see Amédé and comfort him."

"They won't let you see him, child."

"Then I will find chéri Bibi," Fleurette retorted calmly. "He has a great deal more authority than you and I credit him with, Louise. He can order whom he likes not only to let me see Amédé, but even to set him free."

"He would be very angry," Louise argued, "to see you wandering about the high-roads alone, while all those soldiers and riff-raff are about."

Fleurette gave a quaint little smile.

"Bibi's anger against me never lasts very long," she said. "Anyway, I will risk it. Louise dear, will you come with me?"

"I?"

"Of course, you said that Bibi would be angry if I roamed about the high-roads alone."

Louise stood squarely in front of Fleurette, looked straight into those blue eyes, which never before had held such a determined glance. Fleurette could not help smiling at the old woman's look of perplexity; she was the typical hen seeing her brood of ducklings take their first plunge in the pond.

"If you won't come with me, Louise dear," the girl said simply, "I shall have to go alone."

"Get along with ye, for an obstinate wench," Louise retorted gruffly. But the next moment she had already changed her tone. "Get on your thick woollen stockings, child," she said, "and your buckled shoes, and your brown cloak, while I put a few things in a basket for our dinner. If we don't hurry, we shan't be in Sisteron before nightfall."

"M'sieu' Duflos will lend us his cart or a horse," Fleurette rejoined gleefully, "but I won't be long, dear, kind Louise."

And swift as a young hare she ran out and then up the outside staircase to her room under the overhanging climbing rose.

A few minutes later the two women started on their way. Fleurette had on her dark kirtle, her thick stockings and buckled shoes; her fair hair was tucked away underneath her frilled mob-cap. She carried her own cloak and Louise's on her arm, whilst Louise tramped beside her, carrying a basket in which she had hastily packed a piece of bread, some cheese, and two hard-boiled eggs. If M'sieu' Duflos, the butcher, would lend them his cart, they would be in Sisteron by mid-day; but in any case they would be there before dark.

BUT M'sieu' Duflos had no cart to lend them—that is he had no horse. Didn't Mam'zelle Fleurette and Ma'ame Louise remember? Some of those brigands had been round the week before and requisitioned every horse they could lay their hands on all over the country-side; old nags, mares with foals, butchers' cobs, nothing came amiss to them, nothing was sacred. Oh those soldiers! Were they not the curse of the country? And what difference there was between the so-called revolutionary army and a pillaging band of pirates, M'sieu' Duflos, the butcher, really couldn't say.

All this he told the two women, to the accompaniment of wide gestures of his powerful arms and much shrugging of his broad shoulders. It was Fleurette who had put the question breathlessly to him, as soon as she had caught sight of him standing on the door of his shop, blocking it with his massive bulk.

"A horse? A cart? Alas! it was impossible! Ah! those brigands! those brigands!"

Fleurette could not conceal her disappointment at first; but she was so brave, so resolute; she was for making an immediate start so as to get to Sisteron before dark. Perhaps they would meet horse and cart belonging to some neighbour luckier than poor M'sieu' Duflos. But Louise, more prudent, saw an opportunity for putting the mad adventure off until the next day. A start in the early morning could then be made, she argued, and horse or no horse, Sisteron might be reached before the sun was low. A good project forsooth. Let Fleurette return with her quietly now to Lou Mas and sleep on it. That was it! sleep on it! If only Fleurette would do that she, Louise, felt quite sure that counsels of prudence would prevail.

M. Duflos sagely nodded his head. Sisteron? He could not conjecture why Mam'zelle Fleurette should wish to go to Sisteron. Without an escort! And on foot! What would Citizen Armand say to it, if he knew?

Up to this point, you perceive, not a word about the exciting events that had convulsed Laragne a little over two hours ago. M'sieu' Duflos, watching Fleurette, marvelled how much the girl knew. She on the other hand was longing to ask questions, whilst dreading to lose time in unnecessary gossip. She looked about her at the familiar objects: the pump, the shop fronts, the *poste de gendarmerie*, on the other side of the square, and in the corner of the Rue Haute where the soldiers must have stood this morning with Amédé, a prisoner amongst them.

Everything for the moment in Laragne appeared calm, not to say commonplace. The women had all gone home to cook the midday dinner; the men were at their work. Every moment she thought that she must see Amédé coming round the corner with his slow swinging step, looking for her! M'sieu' Duflos and Louise were talking together, not exactly in whispers, but under their breath; the way people talk when the subject is exciting and perhaps awe-inspiring. And suddenly M. Duflos exclaimed with a great, big sigh of compassion:

"If it is not a misery! Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu! those poor Colombes!"

His kindly glance turned to Fleurette, and he saw her big blue eyes fixed on him. And as he was a very worthy fellow this M. Duflos, with a daughter of his own, he could not somehow return that glance; there was something in it that reminded him of a young animal in pain. He guessed that she had heard the news about young Colombe, and he knew, as every one did in Laragne, that Fleurette, over at Lou Mas, and Amédé Colombe were fond of one another, and that they would be tokened as soon as the girl had turned eighteen. This love-romance had been part of the village life ever since the two children had made mud pies together in the market square with the dust of the road and the water from the fountain, and though Armand, over at Lou Mas had become very queer of late, and no one knew anything about the mysterious business which, of recent years, kept him away from home for months on end, every one remembered the pretty Marseillaise whom nineteen years ago he had brought to Lou Mas as a blushing bride, and no one had forgotten the terrible tragedy of her death when she gave birth to Fleurette. With the kindliness, one might say the indifference, peculiar to the peasant, the neighbours put down Armand's growing moroseness after that terrible event, and his secretive ways, to grief over the death of his young wife; and then after a while, they ceased to trouble about him at all, and almost forgot him as it were. But Fleurette had grown up among them all, a true child of sunny Dauphiné, in spite of her fair hair and blue eyes. They all loved her because she was so pretty, and though M'sieu' Colombe, the prosperous grocer of the Rue Haute, might at one time have had more ambitious views for his son, he and Ma'ame Colombe soon fell victims to Fleurette's charm, her dainty ways, her quaint little airs, as if she were a lady strayed into this remote village from some great city, and, above all, being natives of the South, and children of France, they succumbed to the fascination of her wealth; for there was no doubt that Armand was rich, and no doubt that he had made a declaration both privately to his friend Colombe and officially before the notary at Sisteron, that he would give his only child a dowry of ten thousand livres tournois, the day she married with his consent.

And here was this child now, whom every one knew and whom every one loved, turning great, pleading eyes on M'sieu' Duflos until the worthy fellow felt so uncomfortable that he had to clear his throat very noisily and to expectorate on the sanded floor of his shop with a sound like the falling of a shower of hailstones on a tiled roof. He thought that Fleurette knew all the details of this morning's dramatic story.

"Voyons, Mam'zelle Fleurette," he said with a rough attempt at consolation. "They won't do anything to Amédé. Really. The boy meant no harm."

All then would have been well if that fool Aristide Sicard, who was M'sieu' Duflos' errand-man, had not put in a word.

"No one," he said, "is going to believe that Amédé Colombe is a thief."

"A thief?" and Fleurette gave a funny little gasp. "Why should they think that Amédé is a thief?"

M'sieu' Duflos, the butcher, had given his errand-man a vigorous kick, but the correction came too late. And now Fleurette wanted to know more.

"What is your meaning, M'sieu' Aristide?" she insisted with that funny little air of determination of hers, whilst a frown appeared between her brows.

As M'sieu' Duflos explained to the neighbours afterwards, Fleurette looked as if she might be capable of anything at the moment. He was quite frightened at the expression in her blue eyes. It was too late to undo the mischief that that fool Aristide had done, so the butcher took the matter into his own hands. He had a sound knowledge of human nature, had M'sieu' Duflos, and he prided himself on his tact.

"You see, Mam'zelle Fleurette," he began, "it's this way. Those scurvy knaves—I mean the soldiers of the Republic—were full of choler because they had not found enough to steal at the château when they arrested poor M'sieu' de Frontenac. At first, it seems, they thought that Madame and Mademoiselle had taken their valuables away with them when they ran away; but later on something must have aroused their suspicions, or else the same kind of fool as Aristide here must have got talking. Anyway, they seem to have got the idea that Amédé Colombe had hidden Madame's valuables away somewhere and ——"

"Madame's valuables!" Fleurette exclaimed, trying to hide something of the excitement which was causing her heart to thump furiously. "They thought that Amédé——?"

"Why, yes!" M'sieu' Duflos replied to her half-formulated query. "And unfortunately——"

"What?"

"Well! They found Madame's valuables——"

But the worthy butcher got no further with his story. Without another word and swift as lightning, Fleurette had turned on her heel, and the next moment she was speeding across the market-place in the direction of the Rue Haute, whilst M'sieu' Duflos was left gazing in ludicrous perplexity at old Louise.

"What's the matter with the child?" he queried, and thoughtfully passed his hand through his harsh, bristly hair. "I thought she knew."

Old Louise shrugged her shoulders.

"She only knew that the lad had been arrested," she said, "but she had not heard about Madame's valuables being found in the Colombes' cart-shed. I was just able to stop Adèle telling her. She is so fond of M'sieu' Amédé." Louise added with a sigh: "Oh! how I wish her father were here."

M'sieu' Duflos was watching Fleurette's trim little figure speeding across the square and then disappearing round the corner of the Rue Haute.

"She's run over to the épicerie," he commented drily. "The Colombes are fond of her. They'll be able to comfort one another. Come in and have a petit verre, Louise. The child will be back soon."

But Louise would not come in, she did not want to lose sight of Fleurette, so after thanking the kind butcher for his hospitality, she too turned to go in the direction of the Rue Haute. But at the last M'sieu' Duflos had one more word to say to her.

"There's one thing more, Ma'ame Louise," he said, with unwonted earnestness in his round, prominent eyes. "If I were you I would look after that wench of yours, Adèle, a bit sharper. No offence, you know, but people have been talking in the village. She was rather too familiar with all those draggled-tailed soldiers last night."

Old Louise, with all a peasant's philosophy, shrugged her fat shoulders.

"You may be right, M'sieu' Duflos," she said drily, "but the girl, you know, is no care of mine. My sister Amèlie looks after her."

After which she gave a friendly nod to the amiable butcher and made her way up to the Rue Haute as fast as she could, though this was not really so fast as Fleurette's nimble little feet had carried her.

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SIR PERCY HITS BACK

THERE had been no need for words. As soon as Fleurette had entered the shop Ma'ame Colombe had stretched out her arms, and Fleurette ran to her at once to be enfolded in a great maternal embrace. With her fair hair resting on Ma'ame Colombe's ample bosom, the child began by having a good cry. She had had none since she heard the fatal news, for excitement had kept every other emotion in check. But now with those motherly arms round her, she felt free to let her sorrow and anxiety have free rein. But only for a moment or two. As soon as she felt Ma'ame Colombe's ample bosom heaving against hers, and the older woman's tears wetting the top of her fair head, Fleurette looked up, swiftly drying her eyes, and put on a reassuring smile.

It was difficult to speak at first with all those sobs choking one's voice; nevertheless, whilst mopping her eyes with her pocket-handkerchief, Fleurette contrived to say:

"You know, Ma'ame Colombe, that it is all right, don't you? About Amédé, I mean."

"All right, my dear? All right?" the poor woman reiterated, and shook her head with pathetic dubiousness. "How can it be all right, when my Amédé is accused of being a thief? And before the neighbours too!" she added, whilst a deeper tone of crimson than her kitchen-fire had lent to her kind old face, spread over her cheeks.

"That's just it, Ma'ame Colombe," Fleurette continued eagerly. "Presently—to-night I hope—every one will know that it was not Amédé who took those things."

"Of course he didn't take them. But you know what village gossip is. If Amédé did not take Madame's valuables, they keep on saying, how came they to be in our cart-shed? Oh, mon Dieu! mon Dieu!" she moaned, "to think that my Hector and I should live to see such disgrace."

"But, Ma'ame Colombe," Fleurette put in, somewhat impatient with the older woman's lamentations, "I am going to Sisteron to-night to tell the gendarme how Madame's valuables came to be in your cart-shed, and who it was that stole them."

"You, child? How should you know?"

"Because it was I who took the valuables out of the secret place in Madame's room," Fleurette said glibly, "and I gave them to Amédé to take care of, and because it was I who gave them to him he hid them in a corner of the cart-shed."

"Holy Virgin!" was all that Ma'ame Colombe was able to say in response to this amazing story, "the child has taken leave of her senses."

"No, no, Ma'ame Colombe," Fleurette insisted earnestly; "it is just as I have told you. I took the valuables out of Madame's room while the soldiers were at the château, and I gave them to Amédé to take care of."

"But why?" the poor mother exclaimed, in an agony of bewilderment. "In Heaven's name why?"

"Because——"

And suddenly Fleurette hesitated. A hot flush rose to her cheeks and tears gathered in her eyes. She had felt Ma'ame Colombe's perplexed glance on her, and for the time a stinging doubt gripped her heart and made her physically almost sick. What views would other people—strangers or even friends—take of her amazing story? of the heavenly voice and the mysterious faggot-carrier with the wonderful twinkling eyes? Would they believe her? or would they deride the whole tale? or again, like dear, kind Ma'ame Colombe, would they just feel anxious, perplexed, not wishing to condemn, and yet vaguely wondering what could have induced a girl like Fleurette to go rummaging about among Madame's things, and inducing young Amédé to help her to conceal them.

An overpowering impulse prompted her to keep her beloved secret to herself. The sight of Ma'ame Colombe's grief-stricken face almost shook her resolution, but in the end it was that first impulse which conquered. After all it was only a matter of a few days, hours perhaps, and everything would become crystal-clear. Fleurette's little handkerchief was now like a wet ball in her hot hands; she breathed on it and dabbed her eyes; she straightened her cap and smoothed down her kirtle.

"And so, dear Ma'ame Colombe," she said calmly, "I am just going to Sisteron. Probably I shall find Bibi there; but even if I don't, I shall go up to the Committee of Public Safety, and I shall tell them the whole truth, so that there'll be no question of Amédé going to fight the English with the stain of theft upon his name."

It was impossible to say anything more just then, because Louise had arrived at the *epicerie*, breathless, but happy to catch sight of Fleurette looking quite calm and reasonable.

"I hope you gave the child a good scolding, Ma'ame Colombe," she said. "The idea of her wanting to trapeze the high-road to-day when all these ruffianly soldiers are still about."

But Fleurette only smiled. "Neither Ma'ame Colombe, nor anyone else," she said, "could dissuade me from going to see Bibi now."

"Why!" Louise exclaimed pettishly, "this morning it was M'sieu' Amédé you wanted to see."

"I do want to see Amédé," Fleurette rejoined simply, "but I must see Bibi first."

And Louise saw her exchange an understanding glance with Ma'ame Colombe. It was all very bewildering and very terrible. Of course she was terribly sorry for the Colombes, but, just for the moment, she wished them all at the bottom of the sea. A little feeling of jealousy had crept into her heart when she saw Fleurette clinging to Ma'ame Colombe and whispering words into her ears which she, Louise, could not hear, and this uncomfortable feeling added to her discomfort. What could Ma'ame Colombe be thinking about to encourage Fleurette in her obstinacy? Louise could only suppose that all common sense had been drowned in an ocean of grief for the beloved only son.

Ah! if only Monsieur Armand were here!

And with a last sigh and a none too cordial farewell to Ma'ame Colombe, Louise, dolefully shaking her head, followed Fleurette out of the shop.

16

SIR PERCY HITS BACK

It was long past sunset by the time the two women reached Sisteron. Louise was dog-tired, for the day had been hot and the roads heavy with dust. They had started from Lou Mas one hour before noon, and as they left the first outlying houses of the city behind them, the clock of the tower of Notre Dame was striking eight.

The road between Laragne and Sisteron goes uphill most of the way, but withal, it is a beautiful road, winding through the wide valley of the Buëche, past orchards of grey-green olives and almond-trees laden with blossom. Once past the confluence of the Méouge with the Buëche, it rises in a gentle gradient and gradually reveals to the eye the magnificent panorama of the Basses Alpes with their rocky crests and wide flanks draped in the sombre cloaks of pine-woods: Mont de la Baume, St. Géniez, Signal de Lure; as beautiful a picture as Nature has to offer for the delectation of travellers, but possessing no powers of fascination over the two women, who tramped along in weariness and with anxious hearts.

The road was lonely. Scarce anyone did they meet on the way; no one, at any rate, to inspire old Louise with alarm. Now and then, perhaps, a group of labourers toiling homewards would cast a bold glance on the pretty wench stepping it resolutely beside her old duenna. But after a ribald word or two, or at worst a coarse jest, they would pass on and the two women continued their way unmolested.

But the events of the day, subsequently those of the evening, were but one long string of disappointments. As soon as the first outlying houses of the city came in sight Fleurette began inquiring pluckily and determinedly.

"Citizen Armand," she would ask, "from Lou Mas, over beyond Laragne?"

"What about him?"

"He is an important personage in Sisteron, how could I find him?"

And because she was gentle and had pretty blue eyes, and because she looked weary and anxious, people would do their best to help her. Some suggested one place, some another; the posting-inn—he might be known there, if he sometimes posted to Paris—or else the commissariat. This latter place proved a danger spot. A ferocious-looking commissaire very nearly detained the two women on a charge of vagabondage. His ugly leers and unveiled threats nearly sent Louise off her head with terror; Fleurette, however, kept up her courage nobly. The thought of Amédé drove every other terror out of her heart. She had vaguely heard that her father had something to do with a certain Committee of Public Safety. When she told this to the commissaire his manner immediately underwent a complete change; he became almost obsequious, placed himself entirely at the disposal of the citizeness for any inquiries she might wish to make about her illustrious father. Unfortunately, he said, the hour was late; the offices of the Committee of Public Safety situated in the Town Hall were now closed for the night. Citizen Armand had probably found shelter under the roof of a friend. Until to-morrow morning nothing could be done.

One thing, however, appeared clear; the soldiers who had created so much stir in Laragne this morning had not come to Sisteron nor was anything known of them. There was, the now servile commissary explained, a detachment of the 87th regiment of the line in garrison in the city and two days ago a squad of the revolutionary army lately formed for the purpose of scouring the country for traitors and aristos had passed through Sisteron and gone on in the direction of Laragne. The commissary had heard something about a family named Frontenac against whom there was a black mark for treason against the Republic, but he did not know anything about the arrest of Monsieur or the escape of Madame and Mademoiselle —whom he persistently referred to as the ci-devants —nor did he know anything about the arrest of Amédé Colombe, citizen of Laragne.

It was all very disappointing. Fleurette, trying to be brave, nevertheless felt at times an overwhelming inclination to cry. For one thing she was very tired, and being young and healthy she was also hungry. She and Louise had consumed the contents of their provision basket when the day was still young. Now it was getting near bed-time and the goal of her efforts not even within sight. The sullenness and mistrust that seemed to hang over the whole city had the effect of further damping her spirits. The echo of the terrible doings in Orange, in Toulon and Lyons had penetrated as far as this hitherto peaceful little town. Tales of summary arrests, of death-sentences without trial, of wholesale massacres were on everybody's lips. Accusations of treason, it seems, were more frequent than daily bread. The women looked harassed, hugged their children to their sides, as they slunk down the ill-lit streets, whilst throwing furtive glances over their shoulders. The men stood about in groups of three or four in the dark angles of the streets or beneath the ill-lit doorways until roughly ordered to go their way by men dressed in nothing but rags, who wore a tricolour sash round their waist and a cockade on their worsted cap.

And so ultimately to Les Amandiers, a quiet little inn off the main streets of the town, that Louise knew of through the drovers from Laragne who frequented the place when they were in Sisteron on market-day. Baptiste Portal, the landlord, suspicious at first, not liking the look of the two unprotected women seeking for lodgings at this hour of the night, was mollified by seeing the colour of Louise's money and the blue of Fleurette's eyes. His temper, it seems, had not yet recovered from the assaults made upon it a couple of days ago by a set of ragamuffins who called themselves soldiers of the Republic, and by their loud-spoken and arrogant lieutenant; but he was willing enough to make the two women welcome, and to give them supper and a bed. Then only did they tell him who they were and what the purpose of their journey: to seek Citizen Armand of Lou Mas, whose daughter Fleurette had matters of the utmost importance to communicate to him.

"Qu'à ça ne tienne!" Baptiste Portal exclaimed. "Armand was here but a couple of hours after noon. He was on his way to Orange."

"To Orange!" A cry of terror from Louise; one of excitement from Fleurette. Orange, the tiger's den! How could two unprotected women hope to enter it without being devoured? Orange where the guillotine was at work night and day! where men and women and even children were massacred in droves, where innocent people hardly dared speak or smile or pray, lest they be seized and thrown into prison, only to be dragged out again to a horrible death.

Orange!

But Fleurette only smiled. What had they to fear seeing Bibi chéri would be there? Was not Bibi far, far more powerful than the whole of the revolutionary army? Fleurette had seen him at the château, with a great tricolour sash round his waist, giving orders, that the officer in command of the soldiers dared not disobey.

Orange! She was not afraid of Orange! Even if the great Robespierre was in Orange she would not be afraid to go.

After all, what did it mean? Two or three days' journey in the old *coche* which, it seems, left the Place d'Armes two days of the week, at nine o'clock in the morning, and lumbering along through Peipin, and Saint Etienne-les-Orgues, gave one the chance of getting a good bed for the night at Sault, and again at Carpentras, if one was too tired to continue one's journey then.

Orange indeed? Why should one fear Orange, when chance was all in one's favour. As luck would have it, it was the very next day that the *coche* would be starting from the Place d'Armes. All one needed was a few things, a clean pair of stockings, a handkerchief or two, a bit of soap and a towel, which dear, kind Ma'ame Portal was only too ready to lend; these were tied in a bundle and formed the only indispensable luggage which Fleurette and Louise would take with them. Fortunately Louise had plenty of money in her pocket, being always well supplied by Bibi, and then, of course, in Orange, Bibi would be there and he would provide further as necessity arose.

And thus it came to pass that among the passengers who took their places in the lumbering old vehicle that morning were two females, one of whom had corn-coloured hair and eyes bluer than forget-me-nots.

17

SIR PERCY HITS BACK

THE Hôtel de Ville at Orange still stands, as it did then, in the newly-named Place de la République; and if the tourist of to-day mounts its steps, enters the building through its central portal, crosses the wide vestibule and finally turns down a long corridor on his right, he will, almost at the end of this, come to a door which bears the legend: "Travaux Publics."

Should he be bold enough to push open the door, he will find himself in a perfectly banal room, with white-washed walls covered with maps and plans that are of no interest to him, a large desk at one end, and a few wooden chairs. There is a thin carpet in the middle of the red-tiled floor and faded green rep curtains temper the glaring light of the afternoon sun. But on this day of May, 1794, there were no curtains to the window, and not even a strip of carpet on the floor. There was no desk either, only a long trestle table covered with a tattered green cloth, behind which, on wooden chairs, sat three men, dressed alike in dark blue coats tightly buttoned across the chest, drab breeches and high topped boots, and wearing tricolour sashes around their waist.

The one who sat in the centre and who appeared to be in supreme authority rested his elbow on the table, and his chin was supported in his hand. He was gazing intently on a man who stood before him, in the centre of the room, the other side of the table; a man who looked foot-sore and weary and who wore a military uniform all tattered and covered with slime and dust.

The two others also kept their eyes fixed on this man. They were listening with rapt interest to the story which he was relating. Early this morning he and a dozen others also attired in tattered uniforms had come into Orange in a state bordering on collapse. They had made their way to the barracks where the officer in command had mercifully given them food and drink. As soon as they had eaten and drunk, they tried to tell their story; but this was so amazing, not to say incredible, that the officer in command had thought it prudent to send for the superintendent of *gendarmerie*, who in turn had the men conveyed to the Hôtel de Ville, there to be brought before the Representative of the Convention on special mission who sat with the Committee of Public Safety. And now Lieutenant Godet stood alone to face the Committee; the others had been handed back to the *gendarmerie* to be dealt with later on. The representative on special mission who sat with the two other Members of the Committee at the table covered with the tattered green cloth, had questioned Godet, and he thereupon embarked upon the story of this amazing adventure. He began by relating the events which three days ago had set the quiet little commune of Laragne seething with excitement. He told of the arrival of the squad of soldiers in magnificent uniforms, under the command of an officer more superb than anything that had ever been seen in the countryside before. He told of the perquisition in the house of Citizen Colombe the grocer, by those magnificent soldiers, of the finding there by them of certain valuables belonging to the ci-devant Frontenacs, valuables which he himself had vainly searched for in the château, the evening before. He told of the arrest of young Colombe: of the high-handed manner in which the superb officer had relieved him, Godet, of his command, and ordered him and his men, together with the ci-devant Frontenac, to join his squad, and to march with him out of Laragne. He had told it all with a wealth of detail, and the members of the Committee had listened in silence and with rapt interest.

But now the man at the table who was the representative on special mission, and who appeared chief in authority, broke in with an exclamation that was almost one of rage.

"And do you mean to tell me, citizen lieutenant," he said in a harsh, rasping voice, "that you could mistake a lot of English spies—for that is what they were, you may take it from me—that you could mistake them, I say, for soldiers of our army. Where were your eyes?"

Lieutenant Godet gave a shrug which he hoped would pass for unconcern. In reality he felt physically sick; a prey to overwhelming terror. At first, when he and his men had come in sight of the city, they had felt nothing but relief to see the end of what had been almost martyrdom. It was only afterwards, when he found himself in this narrow room, with its white-washed walls and its silence, and face to face with those three men, that fear had entered his heart. He felt like an animal in a cage—a mouse looking into the pale, piercing eyes of a cat. He passed his tongue once or twice over his parched lips before he gave reply.

"I was not the only one, citizen," he said sullenly, "who was deceived. The whole commune of Laragne was at the heels of those soldiers. My own men were mustered before the pseudo-captain and heard him give words of command."

"But Englishmen, citizen lieutenant," the man at the table argued; "Englishmen! Their appearance! Their speech!"

"They spoke as you and I would, Citizen Chauvelin," Godet retorted, still sullenly. "As for appearance, one man is like another. I could not be expected to know every officer of our army by sight."

"But you said they were splendidly dressed!"

"They were. I knew the uniform well enough. Had there been a doubtful button or a galloon wanting I should have spotted it."

"But so clean!" one of the others at the table remarked with a sigh, that might have been of envy, "so magnificent!"

"I knew that there were some compagnies d'élite," the lieutenant rejoined, "attached to certain regiments. How could I guess?"

"It might have been better for you if you had," the man in the centre remarked drily.

Godet's wan face took on a more ashen hue; again he passed his tongue over his parched lips.

"Haven't we had enough of this?" one of the others at the table now put in impatiently. "We are satisfied that those English spies, or whatever they were, acted with amazing effrontery, which makes me think that perhaps they are a part of that gang that we all know of, and of which Citizen Chauvelin spoke just now. We are also satisfied that Citizen Lieutenant Godet did not show that acumen which an officer in his responsible position should have done. What we want to know now is, what happened after the pseudo-captain of the so-called 33rd division had arrested that young Colombe and marched out of Laragne?"

"And in your interest, citizen lieutenant," the man in the centre rejoined sternly, "I advise you to make a statement that is truthful in every detail."

"Had I wished to tell lies," the soldier retorted sullenly, "I shouldn't be here now. I should have ——"

"No matter," the other broke in curtly, "what you would have done. The State desires to know what you did."

"Well!" Lieutenant Godet began after a moment or two during which he appeared to collect his thoughts. "We marched out of Laragne in the direction of Serres. The captain—I still, of course, looked upon him as a captain—had so disposed us that I and my own men were between two squads of his. We were footsore, all of us, because we had had three days' tramping in the dust, one day battling against hard wind, another with long hours spent in scouring the château of those traitors Frontenacs; we were also very hungry. Remember that we had been dragged out of our beds in the early morning, and not given a chance of getting a bite or drink before starting on the march. But they, the others, were fresh as if they had just come out of barracks with their bellies full. . . . They marched along at a swinging pace, and it was as much as we could do to keep step with them."

The man's voice became somewhat more steady as he talked. The note of terror which had been so conspicuous in it at first had given place to one of dull resentment. Encouraged by the obvious interest which his story had evoked in his hearers, he resumed more glibly:

"About half a league north of Laragne, a bridle-path branches off the high-road; into this the captain ordered his company to turn, and we continued to plod along through the dust and in the midday heat, till we came to a tumble-down cottage by the roadside; a cottage flanked by a dilapidated shed, and a bit of garden all overgrown with weeds. Here a halt was called, and the prisoners were ordered out of the wagon. A moment or two later a woman appeared at the cottage door, some words were exchanged between her and the captain, and subsequently, when order to march was given, the prisoners marched along with us; the wagon and horses having been left behind at the cottage."

"Didn't you think this very strange, citizen lieutenant?" one of the men at the table asked; "a wagon and horses which you would naturally presume belonged to the State, being thus left at a tumble-down roadside cottage?"

"Whatever I may have thought," the lieutenant replied, "it was not my place to make observations to my superior officer."

"Superior officer!" the man in the centre remarked, with a gesture of contemptuous wrath.

"I think, Citizen Chauvelin," the accused now put in a little more firmly, "that you are unnecessarily hard on me. There was really nothing to indicate ——"

But the other broke in with a vicious snarl:

"Nothing to indicate——? Nothing? The eyes of a patriot should be sharp enough to detect a spy or a traitor through any disguise——"

He paused abruptly, and cast a quick, inquisitorial glance at his two colleagues first, then at the soldier before him. Had he detected a trace, a sign, a flicker of the eyelid that betrayed knowledge of his own past? of the times—numberless now—that he too had been hoodwinked by those bold adventurers who called themselves the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel, and by their chief whose prowess in the art of disguise had marked some of the most humiliating hours in Chauvelin's career? Calais, Boulogne, Nantes, Paris; each of those great cities had a record of the Terrorist's discomfiture when brought face to face with that mysterious and elusive Scarlet Pimpernel. Even now, crushed in the hot palm of his hand, he held a scrap of paper which had revealed the author of the plot to which that fool Lieutenant Godet had fallen a victim—just as he, himself, Chauvelin, had done—just like that—and so many times—— The penalty for him had always been more humiliation, a further fall from the original high place which he had once occupied in Paris: and with it the knowledge that one day the masters of France would tire of his failures. Ah! he knew that well enough, he knew that they would tire, and then they would crush him as they had crushed others, whose only crime, like his, had been failure.

His only claim to immunity, so far, had been the fact that he alone, of all the members of the National Assembly, of all the members of Committees, or of the Executive, knew who the Scarlet Pimpernel really was; he had seen him without disguise; he knew him by name, not only him but some of his more important followers; and when some of the ferocious tyrants, who for the time being were the masters of France, did at times loudly demand the suppression of Citizen Chauvelin, for incompetence that amounted to treason, there were always others who pleaded for him because of that knowledge. Many felt that with the death of Chauvelin, the last hope of capturing that band of English spies would have to be abandoned;

and so they pleaded for his retention and their fellow-tyrants allowed him another few months' grace so that he might accomplish that which they knew was the great purpose of his life. And whenever in the opinion of those bloodthirsty tigers, who held France under their domination, some outlying provincial districts had need of what they called "purging from the pestilence of traitors," whenever wholesale arrests, perquisitions, wholesale death-sentences or brutal massacres were the order of the day, Citizen Chauvelin was sent down with special powers, always in the vain hope that the Scarlet Pimpernel, emboldened by success, would fall into the trap perpetually set for him. The English spy's predilection for aristos, his sympathies so quickly aroused when traitors happened to be women or young children, was sure to draw his activities to any region where prisons were full and the guillotine kept busy.

Thus it was that Citizen Chauvelin had been sent to Orange. The Southern provinces of France had been left far too long to welter in a morass of treason; there were veritable nests of traitors in the châteaux and farms of Provence and Dauphiné. The country had to be purged: the traitors extirpated; the magnificent Law of the Suspect be set in motion to do this cleansing process. Any man who ventured to criticize the government, who complained of taxation or restrictions was a traitor; any man or woman who owned more than they needed for bare subsistence, who refused to pour of their surplus into the lap of patriots, was a traitor, and the country must be purged of them, until the dictatorship of the proletariat was firmly established, until every man, woman and child in the whole of France had been dragged down to the same level of mental and physical wreckage.

There had been a dramatic pause after Chauvelin's outburst of contemptuous wrath; for a minute or two, while the old clock up on the wall ticked away with slow monotony, a strange silence remained hanging over the scene. Whatever the other three men may have known or remembered of the noted Terrorist's past history, they thought it wiser to say nothing. In these days of universal brotherhood and Liberty, every man in France was frightened of his neighbour. The time had come when the lustful tigers, satiated with the blood of those whom they deemed their enemies, had turned, thirsting, for that of their whilom friends. The makers of the Terror had started digging their fangs into each other's throats. The victory now was to the most ferocious. After the Girondins, Danton, he, who had ordered the September massacres, two and a half years ago, had had to yield to a more vengeful, more merciless power than his own.

Chauvelin knew that. The victory to-day was to the most ferocious. He who would sacrifice friends, brother, sister, child, was the true patriot; the man who stayed his hand in face of a revolting crime that would put a wild beast to the blush, was unworthy the name of citizen of France. Therefore death to him. Death to the weakling. To the Moderate. This was the era of the Universal Brotherhood of Death.

What chance then had this unfortunate Lieutenant Godet now? brought to justice—save the mark!—before a man who knew that to show weakness was to court death. No wonder that all the swagger and the arrogance which made him but a day or two ago the terror of a lot of peasants of Sisteron or Laragne, was knocked out of him, by a mere glance from those pale, piercing eyes. And he—a mere notary's clerk born and bred in the depth of Dauphiné. and thrust into the army, as a mule is thrust into harness—knew nothing of Paris save from hearsay, and nothing of the men whose word had even sent a king and queen to the scaffold. He knew nothing of Citizen Chauvelin, save that he was a man of power, before whose piercing glance and tricolour sash every man instinctively cringed and trembled. He knew nothing of Chauvelin's tussles with those same English spies who had so effectually led him, Godet, by the nose; nothing of Citizen Chauvelin's past life, very little of the present. He was just a mouse in the power of a cat; allowed a little freedom just now, while he told his tale of failure.

"Continue, citizen lieutenant," Chauvelin now said more calmly. "We are listening."

"Let me see," Godet rejoined vaguely, "where was I?"

"On the bridle-path off the main road," Chauvelin responded with a sneer; "half a league north of Laragne. The wagon and horses presumably belonging to the State left in a tumble-down cottage by the roadside. A thrilling situation forsooth. An ordinary situation you would have us believe. Pray continue. What happened after that?"

"We marched and we marched and we marched," the lieutenant resumed sullenly. "We marched until we were ready to drop. We had had three days of marching, and had started in the morning without a bite, hungry! Nom d'un nom! how hungry we were! and weak and faint! The hours sped on; we could see the sun mounting the heavens and then start on its descent. The heat was intense, the dust terrible. It filled our eyes, our nostrils, our mouths.

The soles of our feet were bleeding, sweat poured down our faces and obscured our vision. We marched and we marched, through two villages, the names of which I do not know; then over mountain passes, across rocky gorges, stepping over streams, climbing the sides of hills, the banks of rivers. I am a stranger in these parts. And I was tired. Tired! I knew not where we were, whither we were going. March! March! March! Ceaselessly. Even had I dared, I would no longer have had the strength to ask questions or to beg for mercy."

And at the recollection of those hours of agony, Lieutenant Godet wiped the perspiration from his streaming brow.

"Well?" Chauvelin queried drily, "and the others, the Englishmen?"

"They marched along at a swinging pace," Godet replied, smothering a savage oath. "Without turning a hair. They kicked up no dust. They did not sweat. They just marched. No doubt their bellies were well filled."

"And the prisoners?"

"They set to with a will. And I make no doubt but they had fed and drunk while they sat in the wagon. At any rate they showed no fatigue."

"How long did you continue on the march?"

"Till one by one we—my comrades and I—fell out by the roadside."

"And those who fell out were left, while the others went on?"

"Yes! We had gone through the second village, and were marching along the edge of a stream, when the first lot of us dropped out. Three of my men. They just rolled down the bank of the stream; and there lay on their stomachs trying to drink. The captain—or whatever he was, curse him!—called "Halt!" and one of his men ran down the bank and had a look at those three poor fellows who lay there striving to slake their hunger as well as their thirst in the cool mountain stream. But, nom de nom! They—the miscreants!—had no bowels of compassion. I believe—for in truth I was too tired to see anything clearly—that one of them did leave a hunk of bread by the side of the stream: perhaps he was afraid that those poor fellows would die of inanition and then their death would be upon his conscience."

"Well! And did all the men fall out that way?"

"Yes! We were marching three abreast: and three by three we all fell out. Always beside the stream, for we suffered from thirst as much as from hunger. The stream seemed to draw us, and three of us, as if by common understanding, would just roll down the bank and lie on our stomachs and try to drink. The captain no longer called a halt when that happened. One of his own men would just throw pieces of bread down to the edge of the stream, just as they would to a dog."

"And you were the last to fall out?"

"The very last. I verily believe, when I rolled down the bank and felt the cool stream against my face, that I had died and reached the Elysian fields. A piece of bread was thrown to me, and I fell on it like a starved beast."

"And then what happened?"

"Nothing."

"What do you mean? Nothing?"

"Nothing as far as we were concerned. The bank of the stream, for a length of two kilometres or more, was strewn with our dead—that is not dead, you understand, but fatigued, and only half-conscious with hunger: while those miscreants, those limbs of Satan, marched off without as much as a last look at us! Gaily they marched away singing. Yes, singing, some awful gibberish, in a tongue I did not understand. That is," poor Godet went on ruefully, "when first I had an inkling of the awful truth. That strange tongue gave it away. You understand?"

The others nodded.

"And then, by chance, I put my hand in the back pocket of my tunic, and felt that piece of paper."

With finger that quivered slightly, he pointed to Chauvelin's hand; between the clenched claw-like fingers there protruded the corner of a scrap of paper. Chauvelin failed to suppress the exclamation of rage which rose to his lips.

"Nom de nom!" he muttered savagely through his teeth, and with his handkerchief he wiped the beads of moisture that had risen to the roots of his hair.

"And so they marched away," one of the others remarked drily. "In which direction?"

"Straight on," the soldier replied laconically.

"On the way to Nyons, I suppose, and Walreas?"

"I suppose so. I don't know the neighbourhood."

"You do not seem to have known much, Lieutenant Godet," Chauvelin put in with a sneer.

"I come from the other side of the Drac," Godet retorted. "I could not——"

But Chauvelin broke in with an oath:

"Wherever you come from, citizen," he said sternly, "it was your duty to become acquainted with the country through which you were ordered to march your men."

"I had no orders to take them through mountain passes," Godet remarked sullenly. "We came through here a month ago and have kept to the high-road.

At Sisteron I had my orders to arrest the ci-devant Frontenacs. You, Citizen Chauvelin, must know how conscientiously I did my duty. All the orders you gave me I fulfilled. After Sisteron you ordered me to go to Laragne, and thence to Serres. It was you ordered me to halt at Laragne for the night."

"All this is beside the point," one of the others broke in roughly. "All we can gather from this confused tale is that all traces of the English spies have completely vanished."

"For the moment," Chauvelin assented drily. "It is for Lieutenant Godet to find those traces again."

He spoke now with extreme bitterness, and the glances which he levelled at Godet were both hostile and threatening. It would be curious to try and follow the mental processes which had given rise to this hostility. Godet, after all said and done, had only failed in the same manner as he himself, Chauvelin, had so often done. He had been hoodwinked by a particularly astute and daring adventurer who was an avowed enemy of France: and if being thus hoodwinked was a crime against the State, then the powerful member of the Committee of Public Safety and the humble lieutenant of infantry were fellow-criminals. This, of course, Godet did not know. Not yet: or he would not have been in such dread of this man with the pale eyes and the talon-like hands. The others he did not fear nearly so much. No doubt they too were cruel and vengeful these days. Strike or the blow will fall on you, was the rule of every man's conduct. Pochart and Danou took their cue from Chauvelin; his was the master-mind, his the more ruthless nature, all they did was to try and show their zeal by saying Amen to every suggestion, every sarcasm, every accusation put forth by their colleague.

In fact the proceedings by now had developed into a kind of duel between the accused and the principal judge; it was a duel made up of acrimonious accusations on the one hand, and of defence that weakened perceptibly as the accused became more and more confused through ever-increasing terror. The other two only put in a word here and there. They wished to know how the adventure had finally come to an end.

"In a long, weary tramp to Orange," Godet replied; "weary beyond what words can describe, footsore, hungry and thirsty we tramped."

They had to cover three leagues. How they lived through it, they none of them knew. At one or two villages which they encountered, they obtained a little food, and some drink. For the space of a league and a half, he, Godet, and two others got a lift in a farmer's wagon. On the way they asked news of the English spies. They had been seen marching merrily; but soon all traces of them had vanished.

"Had I been the traitor you say I am, Citizen Chauvelin," Godet said in the end, "would I have come into Orange with my tale? I would have tried to run away and to hide. Made my way to Toulons, what? and joined the army there. You would not have found me then; months would have gone by before you heard of my adventure."

"You underestimate the power which is in my hands, citizen lieutenant," was Chauvelin's curt comment. "Only one thing could save you from the consequences of your treachery, and that was to speak the truth and to redeem your crime."

He paused a moment, and then addressing his two colleagues, he said with slow deliberation:

"We all agree, I think, that Citizen Lieutenant Godet has been guilty of gross negligence, which to-day, when France is threatened by traitors within as well as by her enemies on her frontier, amounts to treason against the State. Silence!" he went on, throwing a stern glance on Godet who had uttered a violent word of protest. "Listen to what hope of indulgence it is in my power to give you. The State against whom you have sinned will grant you the chance of retrieving your crime. We will grant you full powers under the new Law of the Suspect. You shall go into the highways and the byways with full power to seize any man, woman or child, whom you as much as vaguely suspect of complicity in this affair. Do you understand?"

"I think I do," Godet replied dully.

"The State," Pochart put in sagely, "would rather have the English spies than your head, citizen lieutenant."

"The State will have Citizen Godet's head," Chauvelin rejoined drily, "or the English spies. The choice rests with Citizen Godet himself."

There was a moment's pause. The eyes of the soldier were fixed upon the pale, determined face of his ruthless judge. He knew that his life hung upon the decision uttered by those thin, bloodless lips. He was in the grip of a white terror; his teeth were clenched and his tongue clove, hard and dry, against the roof of his mouth. He was terrified, and in his wildly beating heart there was an immense hatred for the man who thus terrorized him. He longed to get at him, to grip him by the throat, to scream out insults into that pale, stern, colourless face. He longed to see that same fear of death which was paralysing him, dim the light of those pale eyes. His own impotence made that hatred more intense. It shone out of his eyes, and Chauvelin meeting them caught the glance like that of an enraged cur, ready to spring. Indifferent, he shrugged his shoulders and the ghost of a sneer curled round his thin lips. He was accustomed to hatred and desire for revenge.

"Citizen lieutenant," he said at last, "you have heard the decision of the committee. It has been found expedient to withhold punishment from you, because it is in your power to serve the State in a way that no other man could do at this moment. You have seen the English spies face to face; you know something of their appearance, something of their mode of speech. Go then into the highways and byways, the men who with you were guilty of negligence shall go with you. It is for you to use the full powers which the Law of the Suspect has placed in your hands. Go scour the country. Yours is the power to seize any man, woman or child whom you suspect of treason to the State, make use of that power in order to track down to their lair the English foxes who have outwitted you. Only let me add a word of warning in your ear. Do not be led by the nose a second time. If you are, no power on earth will save you. The State may forgive incompetence once: the second time it will bear the ugly name of treason."

He had risen to his feet, and just for a moment the muscles of his hand relaxed, and the scrap of paper which he had crushed into a ball rolled upon the table.

His colleague Pochart picked it up and idly opened and smoothed it out: he studied for a moment or two the close writing upon it, then looked inquiringly up at Chauvelin.

"Can you tell us what is written on this paper, citizen?" he asked.

And while he spoke he tossed the paper across to his colleague Danou.

"Is it English?" Danou asked, puzzled.

"Yes," Chauvelin replied curtly.

"It looks like poetry," Pochart remarked.

"Doggerel verses," commented Chauvelin.

"And you can't read it?"

"No!"

"I thought you knew English."

"Not I."

"Strange why a bit of doggerel verse should have been slipped into the pocket of Citizen Godet's tunic," Pochart remarked drily. "And there's your name, Citizen Chauvelin," he added, pointing to the words "A mon ami Chauvelin," which preceded the four lines of poetry written in English, a language which, apparently, no one here understood.

But Chauvelin was at the end of his patience. He seized the scrap of paper and tore it savagely into innumerable little pieces.

"Enough of this futility," he said, and brought his clenched fist down with a crash on the table. "The English spies have been facetious, that is all. We do them too much honour by attaching importance to this senseless, childish verse. Lieutenant Godet," he went on, once more addressing the accused, "you are dismissed, under the conditions I told you of just now. When next we meet face to face, you will either be the lucky man who has helped to lay these impudent English adventurers by the heel, or you will stand before me arraigned for treason and preparing for death. Now you can go."

Without another word Godet turned on his heel and went out of the room. Past the guard at the door, he went with head erect, and with a firm step he walked the whole length of the corridor. But there was one moment when in the vestibule he found himself alone. Unwatched. At any rate he thought so. So he paused and looked over his shoulder in the direction of the room where he had just spent an uncomfortable two hours. He paused and raising his fist, he shook it at the unseen presence of the man who had so terrorized him, and whom he hated because of the terror which he inspired.

"With a bit of luck," he muttered through his teeth, "we shall be even yet, you and I, mon ami Chauvelin."

Then once more with a firm step he walked out of the Town Hall.

18

SIR PERCY HITS BACK

It was on the following day that the *coche* from Sisteron was due to arrive at Orange, and Lieutenant Godet, his mind set on the one purpose, to find a clue to his mysterious adventure with the English spies, hied him to the posting-inn which is situated in the Rue de la République.

At noon the *coche*, covered with dust, unloaded its wearied passengers; a farmer and his son come to negotiate a sale of stock; the wife of Citizen Henriot, the lawyer, home from her annual visit to her mother; two or three skilled artisans from the country, come to seek their fortune in town, and so on; and finally there descended from the *coche* two women, one of whom carried a small bundle, while the other—well! at sight of the other Citizen Lieutenant Godet uttered such a cry of surprise and of excitement that the crowd around him thought that here was a poor soldier who had taken leave of his senses.

The woman who had caused Lieutenant Godet thus to lose his self-control, was a perfectly self-possessed young woman wrapped in a cloak and hood from beneath which peeped strands of golden curls that vied in colour with the ripe corn of the Dauphiné, and eyes bluer than the sky that spread over Orange on this exquisite midday in May. The older woman who accompanied her appeared travel-stained, weary and cross; not so this beautiful girl, who tripped lightly from the *coche* towards the parlour of the posting-inn and with a little air of triumph and encouragement called gaily to her companion:

"The end of our journey, my Louise! And now to find Bibi!"

Even in these days of advanced democracy which in Orange had of late reached its apogee, the shattering of ancient manners and customs had not got to the stage where a beautiful woman would not command the attention and services of impressionable males, to the exclusion of others less favoured. And thus it came to pass that while the other weary and travel-stained passengers were left to look after themselves and their bits of luggage, and to wait their turn until such time as the servants of the inn were pleased to get them refreshments, the landlord himself, a florid man in shirt sleeves and baize apron, bustled obsequiously around Fleurette and Louise, offering wine, bread and advice, polishing the chairs on which they were invited to sit, and generally placing himself and his house at the disposal of this attractive customer.

Fleurette took all these attentions as a matter of course. She was accustomed to being the centre of attraction at Lou Mas or in the house of M'sieu' and Ma'ame Colombe, and although her trust in the good-will of men had received one or two somewhat rude shocks of late, she still retained that self-possession and gentle air of mingled modesty and graciousness which is the attribute of every pretty, unspoilt woman. She asked for a room where she and her companion might tidy their kerchiefs and caps, and use their precious piece of scented soap, and she felt so triumphant and so elated that when she found herself in the privacy of that room she took poor old Louise by the waist and twirled her round and round in a mad dance.

"We are in Orange, Louise darling!" she cried. "We are here! here! here! and in less than an hour we shall have found Bibi, and Bibi will have commanded Amédé to be set free! Just think of it, Louise," she went on more seriously, "four whole days since he was arrested! Poor, poor Amédé, under a horrible accusation of a sin which he never committed! What he must have suffered! What he must have thought of me who knew the truth and did not at once set to work to obtain his freedom. . . ."

Gradually her tone became more and more dull, all the excitement died out of it. She saw Amédé in prison, with irons round his wrists and ankles, or else standing before stern judges who condemned him to a terrible punishment, because he held his tongue, and would not accuse the real delinquent, who was none other than she, Fleurette. She sighed, and her eyes now were full of tears, while old Louise, stolidly, and with much grumbling, got some water and proceeded to wash her face and hands and to tidy her dress.

"Come, child," she said drily after a while, "we'll go down now and get something to eat."

She had never ceased to protest against the madness of this adventure, prophesying every kind of calamity for them both: but Fleurette with the quiet obstinacy of the habitually meek had persisted. She had begun by wheedling the money out of Louise, then obtained the passes for places in the *coche*. Once on the way, it would of course have been ridiculous to turn tail and go back, and Louise, led unconsciously by a force of will stronger than her own, had found herself meekly acquiescing in all the arrangements which Fleurette made on the way. As a matter of fact she had not ceased to marvel at the child. Here was this young thing, who had never travelled in a *coche* before, who had never in her life been further than Serres and Sisteron, calmly undertaking a three days' journey, sleeping and eating in strange inns, and arriving at her destination unscathed. There certainly was a miracle in all this good luck, for old Louise had heard many a tale of what terrible adventures usually befell unprotected females upon the high-roads. What she did not realize was that the miracle merely consisted in the fact that in these outlying corners of beautiful France, in Dauphiné and in Provence, there was still plenty of the good old kindly stock left, some of the chivalry, the warmth of heart, the bonhomie, which all the tyranny and the cruelty perpetrated in the great cities had not contrived to kill; and that there was something in Fleurette's beauty, her simplicity as well as her determination, which brought forth that chivalry and bonhomie and helped her to win through.

When the two women returned to the parlour, where hot milk and country bread awaited them, they were met by a young soldier, who very politely and deferentially claimed acquaintance with them.

"You would not remember me, citizeness," he said, more particularly addressing Fleurette, "but I and some very weary soldiers under my command are deeply indebted to you for your kindness to us, when, like a good Samaritan, you gave us food and drink, on the bridge near your home. Do you remember?"

He looked very bedraggled and out-at-elbows, but frank and kind. Fleurette raised shy, blue eyes up to his, and gave a little gasp of recognition. She well remembered the soldier. She remembered how sorry she had been for them all, in their shabby clothes and stockingless feet, weary and thirsty, and how she had sent Adèle out to them with food and drink. She also remembered, though she would not remind him of that, that he had been very curt and uncivil with her, had made a sneering remark when she told him that she was Citizen Armand's daughter, and also that the men under his command had been positively cruel to a poor inoffensive old man whom she afterwards befriended.

However, for the moment, she was perhaps conscious of a slight feeling of relief at sight of a familiar face; she had seen nothing but strangers ever since she left Laragne four days ago. So when the soldier, still speaking quite deferentially, reiterated his: "Do you remember?" she replied simply: "Of course I do, citizen lieutenant." Which goes to prove that Fleurette had learned a great deal in the past three days, and the word "citizen" now came quite glibly to her tongue.

Lieutenant Godet had told her his name, told her that he was a native of Orange and was home on leave for a few days.

"A real piece of luck," he went on lightly, "seeing that perhaps I might be of service to you."

The two women sat down at the table and he helped to wait on them, brought them bread and cheese and a jug of hot milk, and bustled the maid of the inn if the latter appeared negligent. He made himself very agreeable to Louise, talked of his own journey, and inquired after her adventures. Louise, despite her innate suspicion of soldiers, gradually unbent to him. The warm food further put her into a good temper, and presently the three of them were conversing in the most amicable manner.

When the meal had been duly paid for, the soldier once more offered his services. Could he pilot the citizenesses through the town?

"Well yes, you can," Louise said resolutely, "we want to find M'sieu' Armand."

"Citizen Armand," Fleurette broke in, "my father. I think you know him, citizen lieutenant."

"Know him?" he exclaimed, "of course I know Armand. Who does not know Citizen Armand in Orange?"

"Then he is here now?" Fleurette cried eagerly.

"Of a surety he is."

"You know where he lodges?"

"Every one in Orange knows where Citizen Armand lodges."

"Then you can take me to him?"

"At your service, citizeness."

"Now?"

"When you wish."

With a little cry of delight Fleurette gathered up her cloak.

"Let us go," she said simply.

Louise sighing, but stolid, followed meekly. The thought that she would soon relinquish her wayward charge into the keeping of M'sieu' Armand was a comforting one; Fleurette was tripping it gaily beside the soldier, but the latter's dirty clothes and bedraggled appearance still filled old Louise with mistrust.

They crossed the river by the old bridge and then trudged along the dusty streets to a great open place, now called Place de la République. The soldier led the way across the square to a tall stone building, flanked by a square tower, to which a flight of steps gave access. He seemed to know his way about. At the top of the steps a couple of soldiers in somewhat tidier uniforms than his own, were on guard. They stood in what Louise, who had old-fashioned notions as to the behaviour of soldiers on duty, put down as a slouchy and disrespectful attitude. When Lieutenant Godet walked past them they did not salute. This want of respect of the soldier for his officer was another manifestation, it seems, of Equality and Fraternity. Louise, with her nose in the air, sailed past in the wake of Godet and Fleurette.

After crossing a wide vestibule and turning on the right into a long paved corridor, Lieutenant Godet came to a halt before a door which bore the legend: "Committee of Public Safety, Section III." Beside the door another soldier, also in very shabby uniform, stood leaning upon his bayonet. Fleurette, overawed by the vastness and silence of the place, gazed with vague terror at this man who without uttering a word had put his bayonet athwart the door and held it there, barring the way, motionless as a statue. Lieutenant Godet then spoke to him:

"The citizeness," he said, "is the daughter of Citizen Chauvelin. She desires to speak with him!"

The daughter of Citizen Chauvelin? What did the man mean? Fleurette, puzzled and frowning, pulled him by the sleeve. She was the daughter of Citizen Armand: she'd never heard the name of Chauvelin before. Nevertheless the soldier on guard lowered his bayonet. Godet pushed open the door and the next moment Fleurette found herself facing a large desk which was covered with papers, and behind which Bibi was sitting, writing. A voice said loudly:

"Citizen Chauvelin, here's your daughter come to see you."

Whereupon Bibi raised his head and looked at her, staring as if he had seen a ghost.

Forgetting everything save the joy of seeing chéri Bibi at last, Fleurette gave a glad little cry, ran round the table, and came to halt on her knees beside Bibi's chair, with her arms round his neck.

She felt so glad, so glad that she was ready to cry.

"Bibi," she said softly, whispering in his ear, "chéri Bibi, are you not glad to see me?"

19

SIR PERCY HITS BACK

At sight of Fleurette, Chauvelin had stared as if he had seen a ghost. He did not trust his eyes: they were obviously playing him a trick. It was only a a second or two later that he realized it was indeed the child, come, Heaven only knew why and how, but here in this awful city where treachery, hatred and cruelty were holding sway under his own command.

Half-dazed, he yielded to the caresses of this one being in the whole wide world whom his tigerish heart had ever loved. His arms closed round her beloved form, whose sweet breath as of thyme and violets filled his soul with joy. Then, looking up, he saw Louise standing there: silent, stolid, mutely accusing, and he asked roughly:

"How the hell did you both get here?"

Louise shrugged her shoulders.

"By the coche," she said, "from Sisteron."

"I know," he rejoined. "But why did you come?"

"Ask her," Louise replied curtly. "She would come. I could not let her travel alone."

Bibi's two hands were clasped round Fleurette's head, his fingers were buried in her hair: he pressed that dearly-beloved head closer and closer to his breast; joy at sight of her had already given place to terror. What was the child doing here? How and why had she come? He had kept her so completely aloof from real life, that it seemed to him that some awful cataclysm must have occurred over in that peaceful home in Dauphiné, else she were not here.

His pale, restless eyes searched Louise's impassive face:

"Who brought you here?" he reiterated roughly.

"An officer in a draggle-tailed uniform," Louise replied, still speaking curtly, whilst with a glance that was distinctly hostile her eyes swept round the room. "I thought," she added, "that he followed us into the room."

"What was he like?"

She described him as closely as she could, and then added: "I don't remember his name."

She too had heard the name "Chauvelin" spoken by the soldier and for a moment had pondered. Marvelled. In her downright peasant mind vague doubts, doubts that were eighteen years old now, turned to more definite suspicions. She knew well enough that some kind of mystery hung around the personality of Fleurette's father; she knew for instance that he was really a wealthy and high-born gentleman; but eighteen years ago, in the days of the old régime, the fact that a high-born gentleman chose to hide a love-romance from the eyes of his equally high-born friends was not an infrequent occurrence. If at any time during the past eighteen years she had learned that M'sieu' Armand was really a great Duke or Prince or Ambassador, she would have been neither surprised nor suspicious. But Chauvelin!!! For the past three years whenever rumours of cruelty or ruthless persecution of innocent men and women had penetrated to these distant corners of Dauphiné or Provence, the name of Armand Chauvelin had stood out as the protagonist of these terrible tragedies; people spoke of Danton the lion of the revolution, and also of Marat its tiger, of Robespierre and of Chauvelin.

Chauvelin!!!

And he, meeting her glance, understood what went on in her mind. As to this he was indifferent. What Louise thought of him was less than nothing. It was the child that mattered now: the child who clung to him quivering with excitement. The terror in his heart grew in intensity: it gripped him till he felt physically sick. The mad dogs of hatred and cruelty, which he himself had helped to unchain, seemed to be snarling at him and threatening his Fleurette. With a hand that trembled visibly, he stroked the pretty golden hair.

"Now, little one," he said, steadying his voice as much as he could, "are you going to tell me why you've come?"

Fleurette struggled to her feet. Self-possessed she stood before her father and said firmly:

"Chéri Bibi, I came in order to right a great wrong. I believe that you are strong and powerful and that you will help me to see justice done. That is why I came to you."

He frowned, more puzzled than before, angered with himself for being so dull-witted, for not making a guess at what had brought the child along. His mind just before she came had been so completely absorbed in the latest adventure of his arch-enemy the Scarlet Pimpernel, that the presence of Fleurette, here and now, had been for him like a sudden stunning blow on the head. He felt dazed and stupid: unable to turn his thoughts into this fresh channel.

"Fleurette, my darling," he pleaded, "try and tell me more clearly. I don't understand. What do you mean by righting a wrong? What wrong?"

"Why," she replied simply, "the arrest of M'sieu' Amédé for a crime which he did not commit.

"You knew M'sieu' Amédé had been arrested?" she insisted.

Yes, he knew that. The mock arrest of young Colombe was one of the tricks played on that fool Godet by those impudent English spies. But what had Fleurette's presence here to do with that?

She was trying to explain.

"Then you know, chéri Bibi," she was saying in that sweet, eager way of hers, "that some valuables belonging to Madame over at the château were found in the shed behind M'sieu' Colombe's shop?"

Yes, he knew that too. But what had she . . . ?

"And that the soldiers accused M'sieu' Amédé of having stolen them?"

A sigh of relief escaped him. He was beginning to understand. Nothing to worry about apparently. Indeed he might have guessed. The child had come to plead for that young fool Amédé, and——

"And what I had come to tell you, chéri Bibi," she went on glibly, "is that it is not Amédé who stole the things belonging to Madame."

She paused for a second or two. What she was about to say required courage: and how Bibi would take it she did not know. But Fleurette had come all the way from Lou Mas, had journeyed three days, so that Bibi might right a great wrong, as only he could do, and, once more sinking on her knees beside her father's chair, she added in a clear voice, rendered somewhat shrill with excitement:

"I stole the valuables out of Madame's room, chéri Bibi."

With a hoarse cry he clapped his hand against her mouth. My God, if some one had heard! The guard outside, or one of these innumerable spies whom he himself had set in motion, and whose ears were trained to penetrate through the most solid walls.

His pale eyes in which now lurked a kind of vague terror, wandered furtively round the room, whilst Louise, equally horrified and frightened, exclaimed almost involuntarily:

"The child is mad, M'sieu', do not listen to her."

Fleurette alone remained self-possessed: she was still on her knees, but at Bibi's rough gesture she had fallen back, steadying herself with one hand against the floor. Slowly, noiselessly, Chauvelin had risen and tiptoed across the room, Louise, wide-eyed and scared, following his every movement. They were furtive like those of a cat on the prowl, and his face was the colour of ashes. He went to the door and abruptly pulled it open. Outside the soldier on guard was quietly chatting with Lieutenant Godet; at sight of Citizen Chauvelin they stood at attention and saluted.

"Go and tell Captain Moisson over at the barracks," Chauvelin said curtly, addressing Godet, "that I shall want to see him here at two o'clock."

"Very good, citizen."

Godet saluted again and turned on his heel. Chauvelin looked at him closely, but his face was expressionless. He watched him for a moment or two, as he, Godet, strode along the corridor. Then he closed the door and went back to his seat behind the table.

He had made an almost superhuman effort to regain his composure. He wanted to hear more, and did not want to scare the child. The sight of Godet standing outside the door talking to the man on guard, had made him physically sick, raised that same terror in his heart which his presence and his glance were wont to raise in others. The expression of his face must at one moment have been absolutely terrifying, for Fleurette could hardly bear to look at him; but when he sat down again his face was just like a mask, waxen and grey. He turned to her, and rested his elbow on the table, shading his eyes with his long, thin hand. And Fleurette felt how dreadful it must be for him to think that his daughter was a thief.

So before he had time to ask her any questions she embarked on glib explanations.

"You must not think, chéri Bibi," she said, "that I stole those things for a bad motive. I did it because ——"

She checked herself, and went on after a second or two:

"You remember, chéri Bibi, that evening at the château when we met, you and I, by the stable door?"

Yes, he remembered. "But speak softly, child! these walls have ears!"

"I had taken the things out of Madame's room then," Fleurette continued, speaking in an agitated whisper, "and hidden them under my shawl." She gave a nervous little laugh: "Oh! I was terrified, I can tell you," she said, "that you would notice."

He had his nerves under control by now. His mind, keen, active, was concentrated on her story, his indomitable will was slowly mastering his terror. What had he to fear? Godet was out of the way, and the child's whispers could not be heard outside these four walls. If only that fool Louise did not look so scared: the sight of her face, open-mouthed and with big, round eyes, got on his nerves. He tried not to look her way. While his glance was fixed on Fleurette he felt that he could think of her, scheme for her and above all protect her—he, so important in the councils of State. So powerful. He could shield her even against the consequences of her own folly.

Of course, he must make light of the whole affair. Oh! above all make light of it. The child was silly, wilful and ignorant, but he would know how to protect her, and how to make her hold her tongue. Louise was a fool, but she was safe and these walls were solid, there was really no cause for this insane terror which had turned him giddy and faint, and at first paralysed his brain.

So he forced his quaking voice into tones of gentle banter, forced himself to smile, to tweak her cheek and to look gaily, almost incredulously into her eyes.

"Allons, allons," he said lightly, "what story is this? My little Fleurette taking things that belong to others? I won't believe it."

"Only pour le bon motif, chéri Bibi," she insisted; "because you see the soldiers were at the château, and they were ruining and stealing everything they could lay their hands on. . . . And also because——"

Once more she checked herself, loath to give away that one cherished little secret: The mysterious voice at which perhaps Bibi would scoff. But she did tell Bibi how with the precious burden under her shawl she had hurried homewards until, fearing that she would be overtaken by the soldiers on the road, she had sought refuge in the widow Tronchet's cottage. She told him how she had watched him riding past, heading towards Lou Mas, and how she had become scared lest, if he spent the night at home, he would find out what it was that she was keeping so carefully hidden underneath her shawl.

And then she told him how she had thought of M'sieu' Amédé and had asked Adèle to tell him to meet her outside the widow's cottage, and how she had entrusted him with the precious treasure and he had undertaken to hide it in the shed outside his father's shop. But how it came to pass that those other soldiers, who were as magnificently dressed as anything Fleurette had seen in all her life, how they had come to suspect M'sieu' Amédé of the theft, she could not conjecture. All she knew was that M'sieu' Amédé was innocent and that he must be proclaimed innocent at once. At once.

"I stole the things, Bibi," she concluded, "not for a bad motive, I swear, but I did steal them and gave them to M'sieu' Amédé to keep. If anyone is to be punished, then it must be I, not he."

She was sitting on her heels, and looking up boldly, and with a little wilful air at her father. Her dear little hands were resting on her knees. She looked adorable. Chauvelin mutely put out his arms and she snuggled into them, pressing her cheek against his breast with a nervous little gesture, twiddling one of the buttons of his coat.

Old Louise, sitting at the far end of the room, had listened, open-mouthed, wide-eyed, to the tale. Her furrowed face was a mirror of all the different expressions with which Chauvelin regarded her from time to time. Terror and slow reassurance. "If that is all, then I can deal with it!" he seemed to be telling her now, when it was all over, and he knew the worst. He held the child very close to him, and there was a certain nervous terror still lurking in his eyes as he buried his face in the soft waves of her hair.

"Bibi chéri," Fleurette insisted, "I must find those who are going to sit in judgment on M'sieu' Amédé. And you will help me find them, won't you? I must tell them the truth. Mustn't I?"

"You shall, child, you shall," he babbled incoherently. He was trying to steady his voice, so as not to let her know how scared he had been.

"When Adèle told us the next morning about the soldiers having found Madame's valuables and arrested M'sieu' Amédé, I knew at once that you would help me to put everything right. So Louise and I just started then and there, as I thought we would find you in Sisteron."

"The child told me nothing," Louise protested in answer to a mute challenge from Chauvelin. "I only thought she wanted to see you in order to plead for young Colombe."

"There is no need," he said steadily, "for me or anyone else to plead for him. Amédé Colombe is a free man at this hour."

Fleurette's little cry of rapture gave him a short, sharp pang of jealousy.

"Do you love him so much as all that, little one?" he asked almost involuntarily.

She blushed, and without replying hung her head.

For a second or two he debated within himself whether he would tell her the whole truth, then came to the conclusion that on the whole it would be best that she should know. Doubtless she would hear the story, anyhow, from others and so he told it her just as he had had it the day before from Lieutenant Godet. The magnificent soldiers who had come that morning into Laragne were not real soldiers of the revolutionary army, they were a band of English spies whose chief was known throughout France as the Scarlet Pimpernel: a cynical, impudent adventurer whose business it was to incite French men and women to desert their country in the hour of her greatest need, and who doubtless would incite Amédé Colombe to treachery and desertion. It was that chief, no doubt, who had spied on Fleurette and seen her that night hand over Madame's valuables to Amédé Colombe. He had taken this means of obtaining possession of the valuables, as well as of the persons of the ci-devant Frontenac and Amédé. Both men and money he would use against France, for the English were great enemies of this glorious revolution, the friends of all the aristos and tyrants whom the people were determined to wipe off the face of the earth.

Wide-eyed and dumb, Fleurette listened to him. After the first moment of intense joy, when she heard that Amédé was safe, there had come a sense of exultation that the mysterious voice which had urged her to find Madame's valuables had spoken with a purpose and that that purpose was now accomplished. Monsieur, Madame and Mademoiselle had all been saved by what she believed was a supernatural agency—whatever Bibi might say. No man who was a mere spy and an enemy of France could have accomplished all that this mysterious being had done, from the moment when disguised as a faggot-carrier he had commanded her to look after Madame's valuables, until the hour when clad in a magnificent uniform, daring and fearless, he had found such glorious means of saving Amédé and M'sieu' de Frontenac too, from prison and perhaps death.

And after the joy and the exultation there had crept into Fleurette's heart a feeling of awe and dread for the father who apparently she had never really known until this hour. She had only known him as kind, indulgent, loving—loving in a kind of fierce way at times, snarling like a wild cat if she thwarted him—but always indulgent and always secretive. Now he seemed to lay his soul bare before her. His love of France, of that revolution which apparently he had helped to make. His hatred of those whom he called traitors and enemies of France, the aristocrats, the men who owned land and property, who had ancestors and family pride, and then the English who were the real enemies, who worked against the people, against democracy, and against liberty, who had harboured every traitor that plotted against France. Bibi hated them all and Fleurette felt awed and chilled thus to hear him speak. He, who was so gentle with her always, now spoke as if he approved of all the cruelty perpetrated against those who did not think as he did, and whom he hated with such passionate intensity.

Instinctively, and she hoped imperceptibly, she recoiled from him when he once more tried to clasp her in his arms. This man with the pale eyes and the cruel sneer was not the Bibi she loved. He was just a man whom she feared. All she wanted now was to get away, to get back to Lou Mas. Since Amédé was safe, why should she stay any more in this awful place where even Bibi seemed like a stranger?

Louise now was standing near her, and Bibi was giving Louise some peremptory orders:

"You will go back now to the *Chat Noir*," he said, "the inn where you were this morning. There you will wait quietly until I come to fetch you. We will get on the way as early as we can, so as to get to Vaison before dark."

"Vaison?" Louise asked, perplexed. "But the coche . . ."

"We are not travelling by the public coche," Bibi broke in impatiently. "My private calèche will take us as far as Lou Mas, and I'll not leave you till I've seen you safely home."

"A calèche!" Louise exclaimed. "Holy Virgin!"

"Silence, woman," Bibi cried with an oath. "There is no Holy Virgin now."

Well! of course, Bibi had said that sort of thing before now, but never in such a rough, almost savage tone. Slowly Fleurette struggled to her feet. All of a sudden she was feeling very, very tired. For four whole days excitement and anxiety had kept her up; but now excitement had died down and dull reaction had set in. A sense of unreality came over her: the voice of Bibi giving all sorts of instructions to Louise came to her muffled as if through a thick veil. All that she knew—and this was comforting—was that soon they would all be starting for home: not in a crowded, jostling old *coche*, but in a *calèche*. What a wonderful man Bibi was: so grand and powerful and rich, that he had a *calèche* of his own and could come and go as he pleased. She remembered how deferential the soldiers had been to him that night at the château, and even now her eyes fastened on the beautiful tricolour sash which he wore, the visible sign of his influence and power.

When Bibi finally took her in his arms and kissed her as affectionately, as tenderly as was his wont, she swayed a little when he released her and the things in the room started to go round and round before her eyes. Louise put her strong arm round her and Fleurette heard her say: "Leave her to me, she'll be all right!" She felt herself being led out of the room, past the sentry at the door, and then along a corridor.

When she felt the soft, spring air strike her in the face she felt revived, and walked steadily beside Louise as far as the inn.

20

SIR PERCY HITS BACK

Bibi's orders to Louise had been to go back to the inn and there to wait until he came in his *calèche* to take them home to Lou Mas. And the two women, ready for the journey home, so tired that only excitement kept them from breaking down, waited for him patiently in the parlour downstairs.

The travellers who had arrived in the early morning by the old *coche*, had all disappeared by now; some had found accommodation at the *Chat Noir*, others had gone to their homes or to friends in the city: the hour for dinner was not yet, and the personnel of the inn was busy in the kitchen.

The place was deserted and silent; the room itself hot and stuffy. The air was heavy with the mingled odour of dust, stale grease and boiled food. Up on the wall a large white-faced clock ticked with noisy monotony, and against the small window-pane a lazy fly kept up an intermittent buzz. Now and again from a remote part of the house came the sound of a human voice or the barking of a dog, or the rattling of pots and pans.

Louise, sitting in a large, old-fashioned arm-chair by the side of the great hearth, had closed her eyes. The monotonous ticking of the clock, the buzzing of the fly, the heat and the silence lulled her to sleep. Fleurette, on a straight-backed chair, sat wide awake, unable to keep her eyes closed even for a few minutes, although they ached terribly and she was very, very tired. But there was so much to keep her brain busy. In the past four days more exciting events had been crowded into her life than in all the eighteen years that lay behind her. And round and round they went—these events—beginning with the first sight of the squad of soldiers marching down the high-road and coming to a halt on the bridge, until the happy moment when Bibi had assured her that M'sieu' Amédé was safe and free, under the protection of that mysterious personage whom Bibi called an impudent spy and enemy of France, but whom she, Fleurette, believed to be an agent of the *bon Dieu* Himself.

It seemed a part of her confused thoughts, presently, when she saw the door of the parlour slowly open and the kind soldier who had conducted her to Bibi standing in the doorway. He cast a quick glance all over the room, and as Fleurette was obviously on the point of uttering a cry of surprise, he put up a warning finger to his lips and then beckoned to her to come. She rose, eager as well as mystified, and once more he made a gesture of warning, pointing to Louise and then raising a finger to his lips. A warning it was to make no noise, and not to waken Louise. Fleurette tiptoed across the room to him.

"Your father sent me round," he said in a whisper.

He beckoned to her to come outside. She cast a last look at Louise who was obviously peacefully asleep, and then slipped out past him into the street.

"There is something your father forgot to say to you," the soldier said as soon as he had closed the door behind Fleurette. "But he told me not to bring the old woman along, and so as she was asleep——"

"But if she wakes and finds me gone——?" Fleurette rejoined, and turned to go back to the inn. "I must just tell her——"

Immediately he seized hold of her hand.

"Your father," he said, "told me to bring you along as quickly as I could. You know how impatient he is. It is but a step to the Hôtel de Ville. We'll be there and back before the old woman wakes."

No one knew better than Fleurette how impatient Bibi could be. If he said anything it had to be done at once. At once. So, without further protest, she followed the kind soldier down the narrow street. A few minutes later she was back in the Hôtel de Ville, outside the door which bore the legend: "Committee of Public Safety, Section III." The same soldier in the shabby uniform was lounging, bayonet in hand, outside the door, but at sight of Lieutenant Godet he stood up at attention and made no attempt this time to bar the way. Godet pushed the door open and at a sign from him Fleurette stepped into the room. Of course she had expected to see Bibi sitting as before behind the table, alone, busy writing.

Bibi certainly was there, she saw that at a glance, also that at sight of her he jumped to his feet with an expression on his face, far, far more terrible than when she had told him that it was she who had stolen Madame's valuables. But Bibi was not alone. To right and left of him two men were sitting, dressed very much like he was himself and wearing the same kind of tricolour sash round their waist. There was a moment of tense silence while Fleurette, a little scared, but not really frightened, stepped further into the room. She could not take her eyes off Bibi, whose dear face had become the colour of lead. He raised his hand and passed it across his forehead. He seemed as if he wanted to speak, yet could not articulate a sound. After a second or two he looked down first at the man on his right, and then at the one on his left, then back again at her, and over her head at Lieutenant Godet.

It was Fleurette who first broke the silence.

"What is it, father?" she said. "You sent for me?"

She did not call him Bibi just then; he seemed so very, very unlike Bibi.

But all he said was:

"What—is the meaning of—of this?" and the words seemed to come through his lips with a terrible effort.

"It means, Citizen Chauvelin, that I am trying to do my duty, and redeeming my faults of negligence and incompetence, for which you passed such severe strictures on me yesterday."

The voice was that of Lieutenant Godet. Fleurette could not see him because he stood immediately behind her, but she recognized the voice, even though it was no longer amiable and almost servile as it had been earlier in the day. It had, in fact, the same tone in it which Fleurette had so deeply resented that day upon the bridge when first she had told him that she was Citizen Armand's daughter.

"You ordered me," Godet went on deliberately, "to go into the highways and the byways, and you gave me full power to arrest any man, woman or child whom I suspected of connivance with the enemies of France. This I have done. I have cause to suspect this woman of such connivance, and in accordance with your instructions I have brought her before you on a charge of treason."

Whereupon the man sitting on the right of Bibi nodded approvingly and said:

"If indeed you have cause to suspect this woman, citizen lieutenant, you did well to arrest her."

And the man on Bibi's left asked: "Who is this woman, citizen lieutenant?"

Then only did Bibi appear to find his voice, and it came through his lips just as if some one held him by the throat and were trying to choke him before he had time to speak.

"My daughter," was all he said.

As a matter of fact Fleurette did not understand. That something terrible had occurred, she could see well enough, but for the moment the fact that she was in any way involved had not reached her inner consciousness. She did not realize that when Lieutenant Godet spoke of having arrested a woman he was referring to her. Thinking that she was probably in the way amongst these serious and busy men, she asked timidly:

"Shall I go, father?" whereat the man on the left gave a short, dry laugh.

"Not just yet, citizeness," he said; "we shall have to ask you one or two questions before we let you go."

"Citizen Pochart," Bibi now rejoined somewhat more steadily, "there is obviously some grave error here on the part of the citizen lieutenant and——"

"Grave error," Pochart broke in with a sneer. "We have heard nothing in the way of witnesses or details of the accusation so far, so why should you think there is an error, Citizen Chauvelin?"

Fleurette could see the struggle on Bibi's face; she could see the great drops of moisture on his forehead, the swollen veins upon his temples; she saw his hands clenched one against the other, and how he passed his tongue once or twice over his lips.

"The citizen lieutenant," he said with a marvellous assumption of calm, "has shown too much zeal. My daughter is as good a patriot as I am myself——"

"How do you know that, Citizen Chauvelin?" the other man asked, the one on the left of Bibi.

"Because she has led a modest and a sheltered life, Citizen Danou," Bibi replied firmly. "Knowing nothing of town life, nothing of intrigues or plots against the State."

"It is impossible," Pochart put in sententiously, "for any man to know what goes on in a woman's head. The soundest patriot may have a traitor for a wife—or else a daughter."

Bibi was obviously making a superhuman effort to control himself. No one knew better than Fleurette how violent could be his temper when he was thwarted, and here were those two men, not to mention Lieutenant Godet, taunting and contradicting him, and she could see the veins swelling upon his temples and his hands clenched until the knuckles shone like polished ivory under the skin.

"My daughter is not a traitor, Citizen Pochart," he said loudly and firmly.

"Lieutenant Godet says she is," Pochart retorted drily.

"I challenge him to prove it."

"You forget, Citizen Chauvelin," Danou put in suavely, "that it is not for the citizen lieutenant to prove this woman guilty; rather it is for her to prove her innocence."

"The Law of the Suspect," Pochart added, "has been framed expressly to meet such cases as these."

The Law of the Suspect! Ye gods! He himself, Chauvelin, had in the National Assembly voted for its adoption.

"Are we not ordered instantly to arrest all persons who by their actions, their speaking, their writing or their connections have become suspect?" This from Danou who spoke slowly, unctuously, without a trace of spite or anger in his voice. And Pochart, more rough of tone, but equally conciliatory added:

"The Law tells us that if suspect of nothing else, a man, or a woman, or even a child, may be 'suspect of being suspect.' Is that not so, Citizen Chauvelin? Methinks you yourself had something to do with the framing of that law."

"It was aimed at traitors——"

"No! No! at the suspect——"

"My daughter——"

"Ah ça, Citizen Chauvelin," here interposed Pochart with an expressive oath, "are you by any chance on the side of traitors? What has the State to do with the fact that this woman is your daughter? A patriot has no relatives these days. He is a son of the State, a child of France, what? Her enemies are his enemies, his hatred of traitors should over-ride every other sentiment."

"A patriot has no sentiment," Danou echoed suavely.

Chauvelin now looked like an animal at bay.

Caught in a net turning round and round, wildly, impotently; seeking an egress and only succeeding in getting more and more firmly enmeshed. But he kept himself under control nevertheless. He felt the eyes of those three men probing his soul. Exulting over his misery. Hatred all around him. Cruelty. Godet openly hostile, vengeful, with a grievance for his own humiliation; ready to hit back, to demand humiliation for humiliation, and terror for terror. Revenge! My God! who but a fiend could dream of such revenge? And the other two: that fool Danou and that brute Pochart! No actual hostility about them. Only envy: a mad desire to save their own skins, to purchase notoriety, advancement at any price—even at the price of innocent blood.

And as a wild beast twirling and turning in the trap will pause from time to time and glare out into the open, which means all that its life has stood for until now, so did Chauvelin, with soul enmeshed in vengeance and envy, pause a moment in his mad struggle for freedom. He paused and with wildly-dilated eyes gazed upon a swift, accusing vision of all the innocent blood he himself had helped to shed. Those clenched hands of his, on which his gaze for one instant rested, fascinated, how many times had they signed the decree which had deprived a father of his son, a wife of her husband, a lover of his mistress. And through the meshes that tightened round him now, Chauvelin gazing into space saw before his eyes the awful word "*Retribution*" written in letters of fire and blood.

And seeing the writing on the wall, he felt an immense rage against these men who dared to taunt him, who dared to hit at him, through the one vulnerable spot in his armour of callousness and of cruelty.

How dared they stand up to him, these miserable creatures whose existence was of less account than that of a buzzing fly? And throwing back his head he gazed upon them all one after the other, meeting their sneering glance with a bold challenge. How dared they defy him? Him, Chauvelin? The trusted friend of Robespierre, one of the makers of this glorious revolution; one of its most firm props? Now a representative of the National Convention on special mission? There stood the child, his daughter, his little Fleurette, silent, wide-eyed, obviously not fully aware of the terrible position in which she stood: and they dared to hit at her, to accuse her, without rhyme or reason, just in order to hit at him through her. It was Godet, of course, that vile, incompetent brute: savage and cruel like the fool he was: vengeful for the bad half-hour he had been made to spend in this very room. He must have heard something of what the child had said. At one moment her sweet voice had risen to shrill tones. Oh! what a senseless, mad confession! and he had seized upon it so that he might hit back: have his revenge. But he could prove nothing. It would be one man's word against another, and he, Chauvelin, representative on special mission, with the ear of all the great men up in Paris, would see to it that his word carried all the weight. He would deny everything, swear that Godet lied. His was the power, he was more influential, more unscrupulous than most.

If only the child held her tongue! She would if she was assured that her Amédé was in no danger. How thankful he, Chauvelin, was that he had told her the truth this morning. He couldn't bear to look at her just at this moment, she looking so innocent, so unconscious of danger, but nevertheless he tried to convey to her with eyes and lips the warning to hold her tongue.

Chauvelin had been silent for quite a little while; the others thought that they had cowed him. In their hearts Pochart and Danou were not a little afraid of him. A representative on special mission had unlimited power and this Chauvelin was always a crouching beast, ready to snarl and to spring, and they knew well enough how influential he was. But here was a double chance to show their zeal, and to get even with the man whom they had always feared. As for Godet, he had obviously staked everything on this throw. His life was anyhow forfeit; Chauvelin's threats yesterday had left him no loophole for hope. But here was revenge to his hand, and at worst a powerful lever wherewith to force his enemy's hand.

Chauvelin's mind had been so busily at work that for a while he lost consciousness of these men. After his rage against them he forgot their very presence. Nothing mattered—no one—except the child, and his own power to save her. Through that semi-consciousness he only heard vague words. Snatches of phrases that passed rapidly between those two men and Godet. "Proofs——" "Witnesses——" And then Danou's voice soft and unctuous as usual:

"Of course the more solid your proofs——"

And Pochart's rough and determined:

"Why should we not hear that witness now?"

Godet replied lightly: "I have her here. Perhaps it would be best."

It seemed as if they were determined to ignore him, Chauvelin; to shut him out of their counsels. He was so silent, so self-absorbed; they thought that he was cowed, and dared not raise his voice in defence of his daughter. They were all alike these men—these masters of France as they liked to be called—overbearing, arrogant, always menacing, until you hit back, when all the starch would go out of them, and they would cringe, or else become surly and defiant like any aristo.

"Go and fetch your witness, citizen lieutenant," Pochart said in the end.

Then Chauvelin woke, like a tiger out of his sleep.

"What?" he queried abruptly, "what is this?"

"A witness, citizen representative," came in unctuous tones from Danou. "It will be more satisfactory in this case—the Law does not demand witnesses—suspicion is enough—but——"

"Out of deference to your position, citizen," Pochart broke in with a short laugh. "Go and fetch your witness, Citizen Godet," he added drily.

Chauvelin brought his clenched fist down with a crash on the table.

"I'll not allow you——" he began in thundering accents, and met Danou's sneering, inquiring gaze.

"Allow what, citizen representative?" Pochart asked roughly.

"Refuse to hear witnesses? On what grounds?" Danou put in in smooth, velvety accents.

Godet said nothing. It was not for him to speak; but he met Chauvelin's glance just then, and almost drained his cup of revenge to its dreg.

"No one," now put in Pochart significantly, "has more respect for family ties than I have. But I am first of all a patriot, and then only a family man. I happen to be a single man, but if I were married and discovered my wife to be a traitor to the State, and an enemy of the people, I would with my own hand adjust the guillotine which would end such a worthless and miserable life."

"Now you, Citizen Chauvelin," Danou said, taking up his colleague's point, "are doing your daughter no good by trying to shield her from punishment if she be guilty."

"You would not dare——"

"Dare what, Citizen Chauvelin? Act up to the principles which you yourself have helped to promulgate in France? Indeed we dare! We dare strike at the enemies of the State whoever they may be. That woman," he added, indicating Fleurette, "is suspect; the Law of the Suspect gives our Committee power to arrest her. If she be proved innocent she shall go free. If she be guilty, you, by defending her, cannot save her and do but condemn yourself."

And that was true! No one knew it better than Chauvelin, who but a few weeks ago in Paris had helped Merlin and Douai to frame that abominable Law. The heavy hand of Retribution was indeed upon him. The voice of the innocent had cried out for Vengeance before the Lord, and Nemesis, hourglass in hand, had stalked him now at last. All that was left him at this moment, out of all that arrogance which had imposed his personality upon the masters of France, made them forget his failures and fear him even in the hour of humiliation, was just a shred of pride, which enabled him to hide his misery and his despair behind a mask of impassiveness. He even succeeded in hiding his hatred and contempt of these three curs who were yapping at his heels. And when Pochart for the third time reiterated his order to Godet to go and fetch his witness, Chauvelin made no further protest. He rose from the table and went round to where Fleurette was standing, silent bewildered, with great tears, like those of a frightened child, running down her cheeks.

He held his hands tightly clenched behind his back, to prevent himself from seizing her in his arms and raining kisses upon her golden hair, letting those sneering men see how terribly he had been hit and how he suffered. Godet had gone out of the room to fetch the witness—what witness? and the other two were sitting at the table, whispering together. Chauvelin, through compressed lips, murmured in Fleurette's ears:

"Try not to be frightened, little one! Don't let them see you are frightened. They dare not do anything to you."

"I am not frightened, chéri Bibi," she replied, smiling at him through her tears.

"And you will hold your tongue, Fleurette," he urged under his breath, "about what you told me this morning? Swear to me that you will."

"If M'sieu' Amédé is safe——"

"I swear to you on my soul, that we do not even know where he is."

"In that case, Bibi chéri——"

Quick footsteps outside the door. A challenge from the man on guard. The opening of the door. Then Godet's voice saying loudly:

"The witness, citizens."

Chauvelin looked up and saw beside Godet a woman with a shawl wrapped round her head; she came forward boldly, then threw back her shawl. Chauvelin uttered a savage oath, whilst Fleurette gasped in amazement.

"Adèle!" she cried.

21

SIR PERCY HITS BACK

It seemed almost the worst moment of this awful day to see Adèle—Adèle!—standing there, like some sly and furtive rodent, snapping at the hand that had fed and tended it. The lessons taught by all these makers of a revolution which was going to be a millennium for the people, and inaugurate an era of brotherly love, had been well learnt by all those who had nothing to lose and everything to gain by venality, by treachery and the blackest of ingratitude. And Chauvelin himself had been head master in that school, where this wretched little bastard had learned how to hate; she was the personification of that proletariat which he had striven to exalt, of the low, mean mind that never tries to rise, and only strives to drag down others to the level of its own crass ignorance. Adèle was only a product of that levelling process which was going to make of mankind one great family, full of love for one another, of pity for the weak and contempt of the strong, and which had only succeeded in arousing a universal hatred in every breast and envy of everything that was lofty and pure. The levelling process according to its early protagonists—idealists for the most part—was destined to eliminate all tyranny and to protect those who were too weak to protect themselves; but all it had succeeded in doing was to substitute one tyranny for another; it had not levelled the classes, made one man as good as another; what it had done was to hurl down from his self-imposed altitude of nobility or of virtue every man who was unwilling to step down of his own accord. It had set every beggar on horseback who was a beggar by nature, and kept him there by virtue of ruthlessness and of cruelty. None but a fellow-beggar, more ruthless perhaps, and more cruel, could unseat him. Death was the only real leveller, and this glorious revolution had become a fraternity of death. The Republic of France must march to Liberty over corpses, one of its makers had said, and another added sententiously that no traitor failed to return, except the dead. Terror reigned now everywhere, marching hand in hand with its hand-maiden the guillotine.

The time was no longer far distant when this titanic battle between all these beggars on horseback would reach its fiercest struggle ere it ended in a gigantic cataclysm, and when the gorge of all these tigers would rise at last in face of the daily hecatombs which had made a graveyard of the fair lands of France. But that time was not yet. Men like Chauvelin had seen visions of Retribution like fiery Fata Morgana pointing to the inevitable hour, but the Godets, the Danous, the Pocharts and the Adèles knew not the signs of the times. They had learnt their lesson and were applying it for their own advancement and above all for their own safety, destroying all that was destructible, taking Earth and Heaven to witness that they whose lives had been nought but misery and hunger would henceforth sweep off the face of the earth all those who had only known ease and comfort, who had practised virtue, and never known despair.

And Adèle, whose hatred of Fleurette had thriven all these years as in a forcing-house, had learnt her lesson well. Fleurette to her meant tyranny, the tyranny of riches over her poverty, of good food over her empty stomach, of neat kirtle over her rags. Poverty and Hunger had enchained her to Fleurette's wheel, had forced her to wash dishes, to scrub floors, to sleep on a straw pallet. But now her turn had come. Her very misery had put it in her power to drag Fleurette down to her own level. She had imbibed the principles of this glorious revolution until she felt herself to be one of its prophets. She had spied on Fleurette and denounced her because she had seen at last a way to satisfy her hatred and to lull her envy to rest.

She had plenty to say when questioned by Pochart and Danou; proud of the fact that for over two years now she had supplied the Sisteron section of the Committee of Public Safety with information about the district. She had known the ci-devant Frontenacs and it was—she was proud to state—chiefly owing to her that they came to be suspected of treason. They used to turn one of their rooms into a chapel on Sundays and a ci-devant priest, who was not Constitutional, performed there rites and ceremonies with wafer and cup which had long since been decreed treasonable against the State. Adèle had been forced by the ci-devant Frontenac women to be present at these treasonable practices; she had even been made to scrub the floor of that temple of superstition and to remove the dust from the so-called altar. Her patriotic soul had risen in revolt and she had journeyed to Sisteron one day when she was free and placed the matter before the Committee of Public Safety who had commended her for her zeal.

"Adèle!" Fleurette exclaimed involuntarily. "How could you? Indeed le bon Dieu will punish you for this."

At which remark everybody laughed—except Chauvelin, who smothered a groan. Oh! the child! the senseless, foolish, adorable child! She seemed wilfully to run her darling head into the noose. Adèle turned a sneering glance on Fleurette.

"I'll chance a punishment from your bon Dieu," she said flippantly, "for the joy of seeing you punished by the Revolutionary Tribunal."

And strange to say Chauvelin did not strike her, though she stood quite near him, with only the width of the table between her and his avenging hand. But he did not strike her, even though his muscles ached with the desire to strike her on the mouth. It was pride that held him back. How those men would have laughed to see him lose his self-control with this wench who was only emitting principles that he indirectly had taught her. Retribution! Nemesis at every turn.

And now Adèle embarked upon her main story. Her spying on Fleurette. Long, long had she suspected her with her airs of virtue and bunches of forget-me-nots in front of a statue representing a ci-devant saint. "Saint Antoine de Padoue, priez pour nous!" every time she placed a fresh bunch of flowers before that statue. Bah! such superstition made a patriot's gorge rise with disgust. But Adèle had said nothing. Not for a long time. She knew that Citizen Chauvelin—he was known as Armand over at Laragne—was a great patriot and an intimate friend of Citizen Robespierre over in Paris. So Adèle decided to bide her time, and she did. Until that evening when at last the Frontenacs were arrested and the château ransacked. That night Adèle had had her suspicions aroused by Fleurette's strange airs of mystery, her desire to meet Citizen Colombe alone on a dark night. Fleurette had always been such a *Sainte Nitouche* that Adèle guessed that something serious was in the wind.

Like a zealous patriot she had watched, and she had seen Fleurette hand over a casket and a wallet to young Colombe. She had heard the two talk over the question of hiding these things in a shed behind Citizen Colombe's shop, and finally seen them locked in each other's arms, which confirmed her in the idea that Fleurette, with all her appearances of virtue, was a woman guilty of moral turpitude.

And still Chauvelin did not strike her on the mouth. He fell to wondering what crime he had committed that was heinous enough to deserve this punishment of impotence.

The others listened for the most part in silence. Only occasionally did one or the other break into a chuckle. *Nom de nom*, what an event! Representative Chauvelin! the man of almost arrogant integrity, sent to Orange to spy and report on the workings of the Committee of Public Safety, one of the makers of the Terror, a man whose every glance was a menace, and every word a threat of death! When Adèle had finished speaking Pochart winked across at Danou. Here was a find that would exalt them both, bring their names to the notice of the great men over in Paris. All sorts of possibilities of reward and advancement loomed largely before them. And Pochart rubbed his large, coarse hands contentedly together, and Danou poured himself out a glass of water and drank it down. All these possibilities had made him thirsty.

Fleurette too was silent. For the first time in her life she had come in contact with human passions of which hitherto she had not even dreamed. Adèle, the little maid of all work, with the coarse hands, the red elbows and narrow rat-like face, who wore Fleurette's cast-off clothes and worn-out shoes, had suddenly become an ununderstandable and terrifying enigma. Fleurette felt as if she could not utter a sound, that any word of protest which she might raise would choke her. The girl's words, her bitter accusations, spoken in an even monotone, gave her a feeling as of an icy-cold grip upon her heart. Surrounded from her cradle onwards with love and care, this first glimpse of spite and hatred paralysed her. Only when Adèle spoke of M'sieu' Amédé and of that kiss which had tokened him to Fleurette, that delicious kiss under the almond-trees, only then did a hot blush rise to her cheeks, and tears of shame gather in her eyes.

Beyond that she felt like an automaton, while these four creatures who hated her and who hated Bibi were discussing her fate. Bibi was strangely silent and motionless, although from time to time the others referred a question or two to him in which case he replied in curt monosyllables. There was much talk of "detention" and of "revolutionary tribunal." Of course Fleurette did not understand what these meant. Since Bibi appeared so indifferent she supposed that nothing very serious was going to happen to her.

Presently Adèle and Godet were dismissed. Adèle swept past her with her shawl once more over her head, hiding the expression of her face. Her eyes did not meet Fleurette's as she glided past like a little rat seeking its burrow. Perhaps she was ashamed. Godet was ordered to send two men along—they would be wanted to take the citoyenne to the house of detention. Godet gave the salute and followed Adèle out of the room.

Fleurette's feet were aching. She had been standing quite still for over half an hour, and was longing to sit down. Bibi's eyes were upon her now, and his long thin hands were fidgeting nervously with a paper-knife. At one time he clutched it so tightly, and half raised it, as if he meant to strike one or the other of his colleagues. Fleurette, tired and a little dizzy, only caught snatches of their conversation. At one time Bibi said very quietly:

"You are very bold, Citizen Danou, to measure your influence against mine."

And the man on Bibi's left retorted very suavely:

"If I have transgressed, citizen representative, I'll answer for it."

"You will," Bibi rejoined, and his words came through his thin, compressed lips harsh and dry, like blows from a wooden mallet against a metal plate. "And with your head, probably."

"Is that a threat, Citizen Chauvelin?" the other asked with a sneer.

"You may take it so if you wish."

The man on Chauvelin's right, Citizen Pochart, had in the meanwhile been writing assiduously on a large piece of paper. Now he pushed the paper in front of Chauvelin and said curtly:

"Will you sign this, citizen representative?"

"What is it?" Chauvelin asked.

"Order for the provisional arrest of one Fleur Chauvelin, suspect of treasonable connections with the enemies of France, pending her appearance before the Revolutionary Tribunal."

Chauvelin raised the paper and read it through carefully. His hand that held the paper was perfectly steady.

"Your signature," Pochart went on, and held out the quill pen invitingly toward Chauvelin, "as Representative of the National Convention on special mission, is necessary on this order."

"You may take that as a threat too, Citizen Chauvelin," Danou added with a sly wink directed at his colleague Pochart, "for if you do not sign there's others that will, and sign one too that will be even more unpleasant for you."

Chauvelin took the pen, and the two men, Pochart and Danou, sprawling over the table, had the satisfaction of seeing him sign the order for the arrest of his own child—her death probably. Not the first time either that something of the sort had occurred, that a man put his seal on the death-warrant of his kith or kin. Had not Philippe d'Orléans voted for the death of his cousin the King? Chauvelin signed with a steady hand, his lips tightly pressed one against the other. They should not see, these fiends, what torture he was enduring; they should not see that at this moment he felt just like a brute beast writhing in agony. Not that he had abandoned hope with regard to Fleurette. He felt confident that he could turn the order into a mere scrap of paper presently, and see those two snarling dogs fawning at his feet once more, kicked with the toe of his boot and howling in vain for mercy.

It was only from humiliation that, conscious of his power, he had decided that silence and outward acquiescence were his best policy. He had certain cards up his sleeve which the others wot not of, but he could only play them if he succeeded in lulling them into a sense of security by his obvious indifference. Fortunately his reputation stood him in good stead. He was known by his enemies to be so ruthless and so unscrupulous—such an ardent patriot, declared his friends—that his indifference now where his own daughter was concerned, did not even astonish Pochart and Danou. It was just like Citizen Chauvelin to send his own daughter to the guillotine. And this estimate of his character helped him to play the rôle that would mean life to Fleurette.

So there he sat for a few minutes, perfectly impassive, his face a mask, his hand perfectly steady, perusing the paper, and then deliberately drawing his pen through one of the words and substituting another.

"We'll say the house of Caristie," he said drily, "the other is already full."

Pochart shrugged his shoulders. Why not concede this point? It was so fine to have the citizen representative under one's thumb. What matter if his daughter was thrust into one prison rather than another?

"Is the guard there?" Danou asked. "We have plenty of business to see to. This one has lasted quite long enough."

"There is still that report from Avignon to look through," Pochart added. "It will need your attention, citizen representative."

"I'll be with you in one moment," Chauvelin replied calmly.

He rose and went to the door. Opened it. Yes! there was the guard sent hither by Godet, two men to escort his Fleurette to the house of Caristie the architect, now transformed into a house of detention. Chauvelin did not even wince at sight of them. He closed the door quietly and then approached Fleurette. He took hold of her hand and drew her to the furthest corner of the room, out of earshot.

"You are not frightened, little one?" he whispered to her.

"No, Bibi chéri," she replied simply. "If you tell me not to be."

"There is nothing to be frightened at, Fleurette. These brutes wish you ill; but——"

"Why should they?"

"But I can protect you."

"I know you can, chéri Bibi."

"And you won't see that wretch Adèle again."

"I wonder why she hates me! I thought we were friends."

"There are no friends these days, little one," he said almost involuntarily. "Only enemies or the indifferent—— They are the least dangerous."

"There are those whom we love."

"You are thinking of Amédé?"

"And of you, chéri Bibi."

"You believed me, didn't you, little one, when I told you that young Colombe is safely out of harm's way?"

"Yes," she said, "I believed you."

"Then you will hold your tongue about—about what you know?"

"I promise you, chéri Bibi. But I won't allow Amédé to suffer for what I did," she added with that determined little air of hers, which Chauvelin had learned to dread.

"He won't. He can't," he declared, whilst an exclamation of impatience at her obstinacy almost escaped him. "Have I not told you——"

"We are waiting, Citizen Chauvelin," Danou's unctuous voice broke in at this point. "As you are near the door perhaps you will call the guard."

He did. And stood silently by, while Fleurette was ordered to follow the men. She obeyed, after a last, smiling glance at Bibi. No! she was not frightened; she felt sure that he could protect her, and so long as M'sieu' Amédé was safe——

The last words she said before she finally passed through the door were:

"Poor old Louise! You'll tell her, won't you, Bibi, not to fret for me? and tell her to send me my crochet work if she can. I shall have plenty of time on my hands to get on with it."

22

SIR PERCY HITS BACK

At four o'clock that afternoon the President of the Revolutionary Tribunal sitting at Orange received a summons to accompany Citizen Chauvelin, Representative of the National Convention on special mission, to Paris, there to present his last reports of the cases tried by him since the beginning of the year.

Public Prosecutor Isnard received the same summons; he hastened all in a flurry to the Hôtel de Ville to find Citizen Chauvelin.

"What does it all mean, citizen?" he asked.

Chauvelin shrugged his shoulders.

"I know not," he replied. "The summons came by courier an hour ago. I have my calèche here. We could start at daybreak to-morrow and be in Valence before dark. The next day should see us in Lyons, and the middle of next week in Paris."

"Can you not conjecture——?"

Once more Chauvelin shrugged.

"One never knows," he said. "There must have come some denunciation. You and the President have your enemies, no doubt, as every one else."

Public Prosecutor Isnard's flabby cheeks were the colour of lead.

"I have always done my duty," he stammered.

"No doubt, no doubt," Chauvelin responded lightly. "You'll be able to justify yourself, I feel sure, citizen. But you know what these summons are. Impossible to argue—or to disobey."

"Yes, I know that. But the business here——"

"What of it?"

"Our prisons are full. A batch of twenty at least should be tried every day. I have forty or fifty indictments ready now and we can keep the guillotine busy for at least a week. All that business will be at a standstill."

"You will have to work twice as hard on your return, citizen," Chauvelin retorted drily.

The arrival of the President of the Tribunal put a temporary stop to the colloquy. He too was flurried and not a little scared. He knew about these summonses that would come from time to time from Paris without any warning. They meant reprimands of a certainty. Perhaps worse. One never knows with leaders of the Government over there. One moment they would shout: "Strike! Strike!" at the top of their voices, "let not the guillotine be idle!" They would frame laws to expedite the extermination of all traitors and suspected traitors. The next, they would draw back, accuse you of over-zeal, over-cruelty, what not? See how Carrier had suffered! He had been sent to Nantes to purge the city of aristos and bourgeois and calotins; he had done his best; invented a new way of disposing of ninety priests all at once by the mere unmooring of a flat-bottomed craft, laden with those traitors, and on a given signal opening all the hatches and sinking the whole craft with her cargo.

Well! Carrier had done that. He had effectually purged Nantes of traitors. Nevertheless he was summoned to Paris, and his head rolled into the basket on the Place de la République, just as if he had been an aristo. Look at Danton, and at—but why recall it all? Anyhow, what a week of desperate anxiety this would be until Paris was reached. President Legrange had thoughts of flight, of taking refuge in the mountains as others had done. But Public Prosecutor Isnard dissuaded him. What was the good of running away? One always got caught, and then it would of a certainty be the guillotine. Chauvelin too was for immediate obedience.

"I too am summoned," he said. "We are all in the same boat. As for the business here, it will have to wait until our return."

Public Prosecutor Isnard could not suppress a taunt.

"There's your daughter, Citizen Chauvelin," he said. "We were going to make quick work of her. I had her indictment all ready. In fact the chief witness—a wench who looks like an anæmic rat—was in my study when your summons came."

"I know, I know," Chauvelin said with perfect indifference. "Well! all that can wait till our return."

After which he added lightly: "At daybreak, citizens, my calèche will be ready outside the *Chat Noir*. I await you then and advise you to eat a good breakfast. Our first stop will be Montélimar, where we can get relays. In the meanwhile I bid you adieu. I still have much work to see to before the close of day."

For the first time this day Chauvelin heaved a genuine sigh of satisfaction when the two men had departed. His first manœuvre had succeeded admirably. With the President of the Tribunal and the Public Prosecutor out of the way the business of the State would be at a standstill in Orange, and he would have at least three weeks of freedom before him in which to act. He had planned this summons, and intended to accompany the two men as far as Lyons. There he would find some pretext for sending them on their way without him, whilst he returned in secret to Orange. That was his plan, a risky one at best; but in less than three weeks he would either have found a way of getting Fleurette out of the clutches of these fiends, or he and she would both be dead. Strangely enough at this moment he fell to wondering what his arch-enemy, the Scarlet Pimpernel, would do under the circumstances and he longed for the possession of that same imaginative brain, that marvellous resource and unbounded pluck which had foiled him, Chauvelin, at every turn.

The Scarlet Pimpernel! If that bold adventurer were to know that his bitterest foe was now probing the lowest depths of sorrow, that this cruel Nemesis had overtaken him at last, how he would exult, how jeer at his enemy. And of the many pin-pricks which Chauvelin had had to endure to-day, he felt that none could hurt him so deeply as the thought that the Scarlet Pimpernel might hear of his trouble and hold jubilee over his soul agony.

23

SIR PERCY HITS BACK

THAT first night the party slept at Valence in the Maison des Têtes, the quaint old house with its unique façade which stands to this day in the Grand' Rue, and which in that year of grace 1794 had been requisitioned by the Drôme section of the Committee of Public Safety for its offices. A concierge with wife and family were in charge of the house, and there were two or three additional rooms in it which were often placed at the disposal of any official personage who happened to be passing through Valence. Chauvelin had often stayed there on his way through to Paris and was a familiar figure to the concierge and his family; there was no difficulty whatever in finding accommodation for himself and his two friends in the Maison des Têtes for the night. *Calèche* and horses, together with driver and postilion, were put up in the stables at the back of the house.

Night had overtaken the party when some five kilometres outside Valence, and this last part of the way had to be done at walking-pace. Thus it was nearly ten o'clock before the *calèche* drew up in the Grand' Rue outside the Maison des Têtes, and the concierge, hurrying to greet the unexpected and important guest, had regretfully to inform him that neither the President nor any of the officials were here to welcome him as they had already gone to their respective homes. But the rooms were there, quite ready, at the disposal of Citizen Chauvelin and his friends, and supper would be got immediately for them. The three travellers stepping out of the *calèche* were more than thankful to find shelter and food at this hour. Already at sunset the sky had been threatening; great banks of cloud came rolling up from the south-west, driven by tearing gusts of wind; by night-time a few heavy drops were falling, presaging the coming storm. No sooner were the travellers installed in the dining-hall in front of an excellent supper, than the storm broke in all its fury. It was accompanied by torrential rain and a tearing wind. Such wild weather during the month of May was almost unparalleled in the valley of the Rhóne, so the concierge hastened to explain to the two strangers who accompanied Chauvelin. The night was very dark too, the very weather, in fact, for foot-pads and malefactors who, alas! infested the countryside more than ever now.

"What would you?" the man added with a shrug, "so many are starving these days; they get their existence as best they can. Honesty is no longer the best policy."

And then he caught Citizen Chauvelin's eye and, nervously clearing his throat, began to talk of something else. It was not prudent to grumble at anything, or to make any remark that might be constructed into criticism of the present tyrants of France.

Supper drew to an end mostly in silence. Chauvelin was never of a loquacious turn of mind, and neither of the other two were in a mood to talk. After a curt good night the latter retired to the room which had been assigned to them. Chauvelin before doing the same gave orders to his driver and postilion to have the *calèche* at the door by seven o'clock on the following morning. Then he too went to bed, there to toss ceaselessly through the endless hours of wakefulness, his mind tortured with thoughts of his darling Fleurette, wondering how she would bear this first night in prison, the propinquity, the want of privacy, the lewd talk perhaps, or coarse jests of some of her room-mates. It was only in the early dawn that, wearied at last in body and mind, he was able to close his eyes and snatch an hour or two's sleep.

When the concierge brought him a steaming mug of wine in the early morning his first inquiry was after the *calèche*. Was it being got ready?

Yes! the concierge had seen the driver and postilion at work this hour past. Everything would doubtless be ready for a start by seven o'clock. It was now half-past six. Chauvelin drank the hot wine eagerly; his sleepless night and all his anxiety had produced a racking headache and a state of mental inertia difficult to combat. Slightly refreshed by the drink, he proceeded to dress. While he did so he heard a great clatter of horses' hoofs striking the cobble-stones, a good deal of shouting and rattling of wheels. His windows gave on the Grand' Rue, and looking out he expected presently to see the *calèche* being driven round from the stable-yard at the back. But nothing came. He felt nervy and impatient, hoping that nothing would go wrong. Angered too with himself for feeling so flat on this very morning when he would need all his brain-power to carry his scheme successfully to the end.

He intended journeying with the two men as far as Lyons, and there to invent a pretext for separating from them, sending them on to Paris by the stage-coach, and then returning quietly and secretly to Orange alone. Already he was fully dressed and ready to go downstairs. He heard the clock in the tower of St. Apollinaire striking seven. A minute or two later the concierge, wide-eyed and babbling incoherently, came bursting into the room.

"Citizen! Citizen! Nom de nom, quel malheur!" These ejaculations were followed by a string of lamentations, and a confused narrative of some untoward event out of which the only intelligible words that struck clearly on Chauvelin's ears were: "Calèche," and "cursed malefactors!" His questions remained unanswered; the man continuing to lament and to curse alternately.

Finally, bereft of all patience, Chauvelin seized him by the shoulder and shook him vigorously.

"If you don't speak clearly, man," he said roughly, "I'll lay my stick across your shoulders."

The man fell on his knees and swore it was not his fault.

"I could not be in two places at once, citizen," he lamented. "I was looking after your two friends and my wife——"

Chauvelin raised his stick. "What is it that was not your fault?" he shouted at the top of his voice.

"That your calèche has been stolen, citizen!"

"What?"

"It is those cursed brigands! They have infested the town these past——"

The words died in his throat in a loud cry of pain. Chauvelin had brought his stick crashing upon his back.

"It was not my fault, citizen," he reiterated, protesting. "I could not be in two places at once——"

But Chauvelin no longer stayed to listen. Picking up his hat and coat he hastened downstairs, to be met in the corridor by the concierge's wife and two sons all incoherent and lamenting. The whole house by now was astir. Public Prosecutor Isnard came clattering down the stairs followed by President Legrange, both in more or less hastily-completed toilette. And thus the whole party with Chauvelin *en tête* proceeded at full speed to the stable-yard, where the yawning coach-house and empty stalls told their mute tale. Of *calèche*, horses, driver or postilion not a sign. The stable-man, an old fellow, and his aid, a very young lad, were busy at the moment telling the amazing story to a small crowd of gaffers and market-women who had pushed their way into the yard from the back and were listening, open-mouthed, to a tale of turpitude and effrontery, unparalleled in the annals of Valence.

At sight of Chauvelin and his tricolour sash the crowd of gaffers and women respectfully made way for him, and he, seizing the old stable-man by the shoulder, commanded him to tell him clearly and briefly just what had happened. Thus it was that at last he was put in possession of the facts that touched him so nearly. It seems that his own driver and postilion, up betimes, had got the *calèche* and horses quite ready and standing in the middle of the yard. They had in fact just put the horses to, and the postilion and driver were standing by the *calèche* door drinking a last mug of wine, when from the narrow lane which connects the yard with the rue Latour at the back, a band composed of four ruffians came rushing in. Before he, the stable-man, could as much as wink an eyelid, three of these ruffians had seized the driver and postilion round their middle and thrust them into the *calèche*, followed them in, banged the coach door to, whilst the fourth climbed up to the box with the rapidity of a monkey, gathered up the reins and drove away.

In the meanwhile the lad who had been at work in the stables and heard the clatter came running out. Stable-man and lad then ran to the lane and out into the rue Latour, only to see the *calèche* rattling away at break-neck speed. They shouted and strained their lungs to attract the notice of passers-by, and they did attract their attention, but before they could explain what had happened the *calèche* was well out of sight. The lad ran as fast as he could to the nearest *poste de gendarmerie*, but before the gendarmes could get to horse, no doubt those ruffians would have got well away with their booty.

That was in substance the story to which Chauvelin had to listen, and through which he was forced to keep his temper in check. As soon as the stableman had finished speaking the lad had put in his own comments, whilst the gaffers and gossips started arguing, talking, conjecturing, giving advice, suggesting, lamenting. Oh! above all lamenting! That the high-roads were not safe, every one knew that to his cost. Masked highway robbers held up coaches, attacked pedestrians, robbed and pillaged the countryside. That the streets of Valence were not safe was, alas! only too true. The *gendarmerie* was either incompetent or venal, and lucky the man who possessed nothing that could be taken from him. But this outrage to-day in broad daylight surpassed anything that had been seen or heard before. A *calèche* and pair, *pardieu*! was not like a purse that could be hidden in one's waistcoat pocket. And so on, and so on, while Chauvelin, still silent and curbing his impatience, went back into the house, followed by his crestfallen friends and by the staff of the Maison des Têtes still lamenting and protesting their innocence, and withal beginning to feel doubtful as to what the consequences might be to themselves of this untoward adventure.

The stable-lad was then sent back to the *poste de gendarmerie*, with orders from Citizen Representative Chauvelin that the chief officer in charge present himself immediately at the Maison des Têtes. Whilst waiting for this officer, Chauvelin, sitting in the small parlour, had a few moments' peace in which to coordinate his thoughts. The inertia which had weighed upon his spirits the first thing in the morning had been suddenly dissipated. Already his keen, imaginative brain had seized upon this catastrophe, and planned how to turn it to the furtherance of his scheme. And while his friends, no whit less voluble or more coherent than the concierge or his kind, were loudly lamenting: "What a misfortune, citizens! what bad luck!" and throwing up their arms in utter helplessness, Chauvelin broke in impatiently upon their wailings:

"We must make the best of it, citizens," he said, "I shall certainly be held up here a day or two, on this stupid business, but it certainly need not detain you. The stage-coach leaves for Lyons at half-past eight if I mistake not. As soon as my calèche is recovered, which I doubt not it will be in a couple of days, I'll follow you on. You in the meanwhile can proceed to Paris all the way by the stage-coach. It will be perhaps not quite as comfortable as my calèche, but it will serve."

They demurred a little. The stage-coach would certainly not be as comfortable as Citizen Chauvelin's luxurious *calèche*, and perhaps a day or two's delay would not be very serious.

"It would be fatal," Chauvelin said emphatically. Orders from Paris such as they had received must be obeyed in the least possible delay, a couple of days idling in Valence, when a stage-coach was available, would certainly be put down to pusillanimity and want of zeal.

He could be eloquent when he liked, could Citizen Chauvelin, and on this occasion he was determined to gain his point—to send these two packing, post-haste, off to Paris, and leave himself free to return to Orange immediately. As to what would happen presently, when those two arrived in Paris and found that they had been hoaxed, that they had not been sent for, and would have to return biting the dust and chewing the cud of their wrath, as to that in truth, Chauvelin had not given a thought. To save his Fleurette, to get her away out of the country, at the cost of his own life if need be, was all he thought about, and while the business of trying and condemning prisoners was at a standstill through the absence of these two men, there was a hundred to one chance that he could accomplish his purpose.

Therefore he put forth all his powers of persuasion—and they were great. He drew lurid pictures of what happened to those who were thought to be guilty of dilatoriness or want of zeal. So much so that he reduced President Legrange and Public Prosecutor Isnard—at no time very valiant heroes—to a state of abject fear, and half an hour later had the satisfaction of bidding them *au revoir*, in the yard of the posting-inn, they having found seats in the stage-coach to Lyons.

As soon as he had seen the last of them, he made haste to requisition a chaise and the only horses to be had in Valence, to take him forthwith to Orange.

As for his own *calèche*, he wished the foot-pads joy in its possession and cared less than nothing what became of his driver or his postilion.

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COULD Citizen Chauvelin have seen his *calèche* and horses a couple of hours later on the road, he would perhaps not have been quite so complacent as to its fate. After rattling over the cobble-stones of Valence and tearing down the high-road at maddening speed, it slackened a little for the hill, and worked its way slowly up through the small township of Livron. A quarter of a league or so further, it turned off at the cross-roads in the direction of Cest and after another half-hour came to a halt at that small cottage which still nestles to this day, with its tumble-down roof and vine-covered harbour, beside the celebrated Roman ruins at the foot of the hill, not far from the banks of the Drôme.

Three ruffians, grimy from the roots of their hair to their down-at-heel shoes, jumped out of the *calèche*, dragging after them in the open the driver and postilion lately in the employ of Citizen Chauvelin, Representative of the National Convention on special mission. Whilst thus journeying between Valence and Livron these two poor wretches had been securely pinioned with ropes, but they were not gagged, and they used the freedom left to their tongues by uttering oaths and protests which appeared vastly to amuse their captors.

The fourth ruffian—for ruffian he was—despite the fact that he had donned a bourgeois' dress, the better to carry out his coup and pass unnoticed on the road, had in the meanwhile scrambled down from the box.

"Quite successful so far," he remarked lightly, speaking in English, and rubbing his hands, which were slender and long and firm, contentedly together.

"What shall we do with these?" one of his companions asked, laughing, and pointing to the two woebegone prisoners, who had ceased to curse and to protest, chiefly owing to want of breath, but also through astonishment at finding themselves the victims of some kind of foreign brigands whose language they did not understand.

"Poor beggars!" the other said lightly. "We'll place them in front of an excellent breakfast and I'll warrant we need not as much as tie their legs to their chairs. Get them inside, Ffoulkes, will you, and I'll talk to them as soon as Tony and I have seen to the horses."

"You don't think the gendarmerie from Valence will be after us, Blakeney, do you?"

"Not they," Sir Percy replied. "They are very short of horses in these parts, and the best will, I doubt not, be requisitioned by my friend M. Chambertin for his own use. I wonder now," he added musing, "what he is after, taking those two ruffians with him to Paris; and whether his errand is sufficiently urgent to cause him to travel in the stage-coach, now that we have borrowed his calèche. . . ."

He paused, slightly frowning, evidently a little puzzled.

"I wonder," he added, "if our friend in there can throw some light upon the matter."

After which Sir Percy Blakeney and Lord Antony Dewhurst took the streaming horses out of the shafts, relieved them of their harness and gave them a good rub down, a drink and a feed, while Sir Andrew Ffoulkes and Lord Hastings went into the cottage and busied themselves with their prisoners.

My Lord Stowmaries was for the moment in charge of this untenanted cottage, which was a stronghold as well as a rallying-place of the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel, as it lay perdu, off both the main and the secondary roads. He it was who had prepared food for his chief and his comrades with the assistance of one Amédé Colombe. The cottage consisted of four rooms; unsecurely sheltered against the weather by a cracked roof, and against damp by broken floors. There were a few very rare pieces of furniture in the place, abandoned there by the late owner and his family, worthy farmers whom the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel had conveyed safely out of France when their loyal adherence to their exiled seigneurs had brought them under the ban of the Revolutionary Government.

In one of the rooms the two prisoners were busy for the moment pinching one another to see if they were really awake. After thinking that they were within sight of death at the hands of a band of malefactors, they found themselves sitting at a table in front of an excellent plate of soup, some bread and cheese and a very large mug of excellent wine, while the cords round their bodies had been removed. Anyway, a very pleasant dream. Leaving conjecture to take care of itself, they fell to on this welcome repast with a healthy appetite. The door which gave on the larger room had been left open, and through it the two men could see the band of malefactors falling to, just like themselves, in front of an excellent meal, laughing and talking in that same gibberish language which they did not understand.

"They don't look to me much like brigands," the driver remarked presently, speaking with his mouth full, "in spite of their dirty clothes."

"And that tall one," the postilion added thoughtfully, "he seems to be their captain. If you ask me I think he is an aristo."

"Or an English spy."

The other shook his head.

"Not he. English spies would have murdered us."

"Then what in the name of hell——"

He got no further, the postilion had gripped him by the arm.

"Nom de nom!" the postilion exclaimed; and expressed further amazement by a prolonged whistle. "If that is not Amédé Colombe."

"Qui çà Amédé Colombe?" the other asked.

"The son of the grocer over at Laragne. I know, I come from those parts. But what the hell is he doing here?"

Amédé Colombe, sitting at the table with his wonderful new friends, caught the sound of his name, and gave an anxious start.

"Do not worry about them, my young friend," Sir Percy Blakeney said reassuringly. "Before they could do you any harm we shall be many leagues out of the way."

At which postilion and driver gazed at one another, more puzzled than ever before. Were they really dreaming, or had they actually heard that foreigner speaking their own language?—and perfectly. The driver was inclined to think that the wine which they had been drinking was potent enough to be the cause of an hallucination. Not that this deterred him from pouring himself out another mugful, and drinking it down with much smacking of the lips and sighs of contentment. It was such very excellent wine. Didn't his friend the postilion agree with him? Why of course, and the filling and refilling of the two mugs continued apace and at a great rate.

"They'll be blind in a few moments," Lord Antony Dewhurst remarked, glancing over his shoulder at the two men.

And he was right in this surmise. In less than a quarter of an hour driver and postilion were blind to the world with arms stretched out across the table, their heads buried in the bend of their elbows, breathing stertorously.

"You are not eating, my friend," my Lord Stowmaries remarked to Amédé Colombe, who in truth had been sitting silent, self-absorbed, neither eating nor drinking.

"Friend Amédé does not appreciate your cooking, old man," Blakeney put in lightly. "It is fairly bad, I confess. Is it not, Monsieur Amédé?"

"It is excellent, milor'," the young man sighed, "but I ask you, how can I eat or drink when I am in such terrible anxiety?"

"We were just going to discuss the best way—and the quickest—of alleviating your anxiety, mon ami," Sir Percy rejoined, "all we were waiting for was for those two amiable gentlemen over there to become deaf temporarily as well as blind."

"It is not for myself that I am anxious, milor'," the young man said timidly. He was over-shy of these wonderful men, who had led him from adventure to adventure, in a manner that had almost addled his poor brain. His unsophisticated mind was still vibrating with the excitement of the unforgettable hour, when throwing disguise aside these strangers had revealed themselves not as revolutionary soldiers at all, but as mysterious beings, whose actions had appeared to him to savour of the supernatural. It took him a long time to understand the situation. It seems that his being in possession of Madame de Frontenac's valuables was known to the girl Adèle who was nothing but a spy in the pay of the Committee of Public Safety. She had that night spied upon him and the girl he loved, seen the girl hand over the valuables to him, and revealed the fact to the Committee. Had these mysterious strangers not played the part of revolutionary soldiers and got him, Amédé, safely out of the way, before the real soldiers appeared upon the scene, he would at this moment be languishing in a prison at Sisteron or Orange preparatory to being sent either to the guillotine or for cannon-fodder on the frontier.

All this Amédé understood well enough; he cursed Adèle a thousand times in his heart for being such a snake in the grass. What he could not understand was why these strangers should take an interest in him and in his fate. When to his timid query on that subject their leader laughingly replied: "Sport! mon ami, the fun, the excitement! nothing more philanthropic, I assure you, than just sport!" he understood still less.

No wonder that to him, Amédé Colombe, the whole adventure had come as a manifestation of something supernatural. As for M. de Frontenac, his fellow-sufferer, on the other hand, he had apparently been prepared for that manifestation. It appeared that Madame and Mademoiselle had already been rescued from peril and taken to a place of safety, where presently M. de Frontenac would be able to join them, always through the instrumentality of these wonder-working strangers. The last thing M. de Frontenac had said to him, Amédé, when he took leave of him a couple of days ago, somewhere in the lonely mountain paths where the party had called a halt, was: "Trust these Englishmen, Amédé, trust them with everything you hold dear. Look at me, had I not trusted them with my wife and daughter I should have seen my dear ones first, and myself afterwards, facing the guillotine at this very hour!"

It was with these words ringing in his ears that Amédé, sitting now amongst these men to whom he owed his life, had mustered up sufficient courage to reiterate more firmly: "It is not for myself I am anxious, milor'."

"I know that, mon ami," Sir Percy replied, "you are thinking of that brave little girl—Fleurette. Isn't that her name?"

"Yes, milor'," Amédé whispered timidly.

"Some of my friends and I are going straightway back to look after her now."

"And you will hurry, milor', you will hurry, will you not? Every day may be fatal for her."

"I think not," Blakeney said in that decisive way of his, which carried so much conviction. "You told me she was the daughter of a man high up in the councils of the revolutionary government."

"One Armand, milor'," Amédé continued. "Little is known of him in the neighbourhood, save that he is a widower and apparently has influence with the government."

"Fleurette is an only child?"

"Yes. She has lived at Lou Mas all her life."

"If her father has influence he can protect her for a time."

"For a time—yes! But—oh, milor'!" the poor young man suddenly burst out with passionate vehemence, "if anything were to happen to Fleurette I would curse you for having saved my life."

Blakeney smiled at the young man's eagerness.

"Listen, friend Amédé," he said lightly, "are you going to trust me and my friends?"

And Amédé, who remembered those last solemn words spoken by M. de Frontenac, looked into those lazy grey eyes, meeting that half earnest, half-humorous glance beneath the heavy lids, replied simply: "Yes, milor'!"

"And you will accord me what my friends accord so ungrudgingly, bless them, implicit obedience?"

Again Amédé replied simply: "Yes, milor'!" And then he added: "What am I to do?"

"For the moment nothing," Sir Percy replied, "but remain here quietly and alone until you hear from me again. Can you do it?"

"If you command."

"You won't mind the loneliness?"

"I shall be thinking of Fleurette and trusting you."

"Come, that's brave!" Sir Percy concluded lightly. "You will find some provisions in the armoire in this room: but apart from that you will find your way every day down to the river, and, turning to your right, you will walk along its bank till you come to a derelict shed hidden from view by two old walnut-trees. In a corner of the shed, beneath a pile of leaves, you will find something to comfort you, either a loaf of bread, or a piece of cheese, sometimes a jug of milk or a bottle of wine. Scanty fare probably, but it will suffice to keep the wolf from the door. Those who supply it are poor and risk much to do it. They owe my friends and me a debt which they pay in this fashion. Now are you prepared to live this life of a lonely anchorite while my friends and I return to Laragne and gather news of your Fleurette?"

"If I could only come with you, milor'!" Amédé sighed.

"Tush, man, what were the good of that?" Sir Percy retorted with a slight note of impatience in his pleasant voice. "You would only lead us all—and your Fleurette into trouble."

"But you will bring me news of her soon?" Amédé entreated with tears in his kind, innocent-looking eyes.

"Either news of her—or Fleurette herself."

Amédé shook his head. "She would not leave her father," he said dolefully.

"Then she will be safe with him, until better times come along, which will be very soon, friend Amédé, you may take that from me. Another few months—very few—and the dragon's own teeth will be turned against itself. This anarchy cannot endure for ever, because all evil, friend Amédé, is by the grace of God finite."

He spoke these last words with unwonted earnestness, and simple Amédé Colombe looked up to him with awe as to a prophet standing there, magnificent in energy and strength, head thrown back, the lazy eyes beneath their heavy lids flashing with unquenchable inner fire. And suddenly he checked himself, laughter chased away earnestness, the eyes twinkled with merriment like those of a care-free schoolboy, rather than a seer.

"La!" he said lightly, "I verily believe we were waxing serious. No cause for that, eh, friend Amédé? My friends and I are off on a gay adventure. To take a message of love from you to a brave little girl who loves you, a shade better, methinks, than she loves that mysterious father of hers. Write your love-letter, my friend, but be sure and make it brief, and I'll deliver it myself in her own little hands. I saw her, that sweet wench of yours, no woman ever showed more pluck than she did when she went to seek Madame de Frontenac's valuables."

"You saw her, milor'?" Amédé exclaimed, wide-eyed. "Mon Dieu! is there anything that you do not see?"

"There is, mon ami," Sir Percy replied gaily. "I have never seen your pretty Fleurette's mysterious father. He must be a fine man to keep the love of so sweet a daughter. So write your letter, my friend," he went on, and pointing to an oaken desk at the further end of the room on which were quill-pen, inkpot and sand, "and I promise you that I will deliver it, if only for the pleasure of having a squint at the mysterious owner of Lou Mas. Heigh-ho!" he added with a contented sigh, "but this promises to be fine sport. What say you, Ffoulkes, or you, Tony? We are going to put our heads into the wolf's jaws again, eh? Stowmaries, you too, and Hastings. But we'll do it, and I promise you that the sight of pretty Fleurette will be a fitting compensation for some very unpleasant half-hours we may have to go through. Now then, friend Amédé! your love missive, and two of you put the horses to, we'll have to make Montélimar by nightfall! there we'll either abandon the calèche, steal a couple of horses and cut across the hills to Sisteron, or keep to the calèche and the road as far as the neighbourhood of Orange, where much information can always be gleaned about the district. We'll make no plans now and trust to luck and chance. What?"

Lord Tony then pointed, smiling, to the driver and postilion still fast asleep in the adjoining room.

"What is to happen to those mudlarks?" he asked.

"We'll take them along, of course," Blakeney replied. "So thrust them into the bottom of the calèche, under the seat for choice, and those who sit inside can use them as footstools. Where we leave the calèche, there we leave them too, to find their way back to the bosom of their families in due course."

He looked so gay and so full of life and strength, so sure of himself, such pure joy in this new adventure radiated from his entire person, that some of that divine spark in him set Amédé Colombe's blood tingling through his veins. Anxiety, melancholy, doubt fell away from him at a glance from those lazy eyes now twinkling with joy, at sight of that firm mouth, ever softened by a smile; of those long, slender hands, delicate as a woman's, firm as those of a leader of men. Poor Amédé was almost happy at this moment, feeling that he was one with this band of heroes, that just by obedience and self-effacement, he could feel that he was one of them.

In cramped schoolboy hand, he wrote a brief, very brief little line to Fleurette, and told her how he adored her and longed for her nearness. He also told her that whatever else happened he implored her to trust the bearer of this note, who would be the means of bringing her back one day to the shelter of her Amédé's arms.

Less than an hour later he was all alone in the tumble-down cottage that nestled against the ruins of a former, long-since-dead civilization. The late afternoon was soothing and balmy, the sky of a pale turquoise, clear and translucent, and as Amédé, standing somewhat forlorn at the cottage door, watching the narrow road over which the *calèche* had lumbered awhile ago, bearing away his mysterious new friends, the pale crescent of the moon appeared above the snow-capped crest of La Lance, and Amédé, remembering the old superstition, bowed solemnly nine times to the moon.

25

SIR PERCY HITS BACK

WHAT irked Fleurette most in her prison life was the monotony of it: the want of something to do. After she had cleaned out the room which she shared with ten others, and put herself and everything tidy, the day appeared interminably long. She did her crochet work while her supply of thread lasted; old Louise had been allowed to make up a bundle of some clothes for her, and in it she had also put the crochet work and a few hanks of thread, but a few days saw the end of this supply, after which there was nothing with which Fleurette could occupy her fingers. Some of her fellow-prisoners had needles, cotton and thimbles, and presently Fleurette, always willing and always smiling, was asked to darn and mend their clothes. She was glad enough to do it, as a means of killing time.

They were a heterogeneous crowd these fellow-prisoners of hers, culled from every social grade from the great lady to the troll out of the street. Misfortune and the precariousness of existence had brought these usually warring elements closely together: friendships sprang up where in the past even a nod of recognition would have been grudged. The Comtesse de Mornas, who belonged to the highest aristocracy of Provence, would take her morning exercise with her arm round the waist of Eugénie Blanc, daughter of a second-hand clothes dealer of Orange. Hélène de Mornas's husband had been guillotined three months ago on some trumped-up charge or other, and Eugénie Blanc's father, accused of traffic with the enemy—whoever that enemy might be no one knew—had perished in that awful wholesale massacre perpetrated in Orange last month. Sorrow brought these two women together, as it did many others, and when Claire de Châtelard, obviously a woman of evil reputation, sought Fleurette's compassion with a tale of hunger, misery and arrest, that compassion was freely given, and the girl who had led such a sheltered life at Lou Mas, knowing nothing of temptation or of evil, had for daily companion after that, one Claire de Châtelard, the most notorious jade of Orange.

Thus the first few days went by. In the prison—it is Architect Caristie's house with all the furniture turned out of it and the rooms left bare of everything save a few benches, a few paillasses, a table, a wash-hand basin or two—in the prison great puzzlement prevails. Hitherto every day, just before sunset, a captain of the guard with half a dozen men would enter the courtyard and, standing there, would in a loud voice read out a list of names. That list was the Roll-call, the decrees of the Revolutionary Tribunal condemning so many to the guillotine on the morrow. And at all the windows of the houses around the courtyard, heads would appear: men and women—yes! and children too—clutching their prison bars, and listening. Listening if their name be upon that list. And then a sigh of relief if that name was not called: another day's respite! another day in which to drag this miserable, precarious existence. As for the others, the ones whose names were read out in a loud voice by the captain of the guard, there was nothing for it but to clasp their loved ones, or mayhap only the newly-found friend, in their arms—for the last time. That same night they were transferred to the prison of the Hôtel de Ville, and in the morning the guillotine. Sometimes not that. Just driven like a herd to the slaughter: on the bridge or the Place de la République. And there the guns. And death pell-mell. Like cattle, with ne'er a grave nor a prayer.

That was how it had been before Fleurette's arrival. That cinder-wench Claire de Châtelard told her how it used to be. But Fleurette never saw anything of that. The very day after her arrival was marked by the non-appearance of the captain of the guard with his list. They all wondered, put their heads together, and for an hour or two after the usual time there was whispering, conjecturing going on. Respite for everybody: that was of course what it meant. But why? Had that awful Revolution really come to an end, as everybody had prophesied it would? Had all those tigers up in Paris really devoured one another, and was there no one left to carry on the infamy? Well! that was perhaps how it was. But no one knew anything. Not the warders. Not the prisoners. Not anybody. Inside these walls wherein news was wont to penetrate with extraordinary precision and rapidity, nothing was known. Nothing. Except that there was no list and that on the morrow the guillotine was idle.

This new departure from regular routine was accepted with the same stoicism as everything else. It was the stoicism of supreme helplessness, or rather of despair, and it had engendered in all these people, men and women, herded here together on the eve of death, a kind of levity which it is difficult for modern thought to understand. Death was so familiar to them, such a daily companion, that they had ceased to think of him with awe. Familiarity had bred contempt. And deriding Death, they turned him into ridicule. Made game of him, defied him to break their spirit. It was a species of madness born of intense horror and absolute despair. Fleurette at first felt sick and wretched at sight of these people—proud countesses and high-born seigneurs, as well as muckworms and jades—acting the guillotine, as they called it, in the great hall of Architect Caristie's house which was assigned to them for recreation. She, poor little soul, had never learned to envisage death as anything but awesome for which the Holy Church was at pains to prepare doomed mankind with sacraments and prayers.

The first time she saw them all in their gruesome mummery, she fled affrighted back to the dark, noisome room where she slept, and throwing herself on her miserable paillasse, she sobbed her little heart out with horror and grief, stuffed her fingers into her ears so as not to hear the voices and the laughter that came from the great hall. Here Claire de Châtelard found her an hour later, and I think this was the beginning of their friendship, for the wench found just the right words wherewith to console this ignorant little country mouse.

"Their one recreation," she urged. "They mean no irreverence. Just think of them face to face with death. Always. Deprived of every consolation: mocked, jeered at. This play-acting is only a blind to hide their own misery, the despair which they are too proud to display."

After a while Fleurette dried her tears. But she slept ill that night. Nightmares pursued her. Visions of that mock tribunal, with the mock prosecutor, and the mock culprit. And then the setting up of two chairs, and draping them with bits of crimson rags to represent the guillotine. Once or twice she sat up on her hard paillasse, hardly able to smother a scream which would have roused her room-mates from their sleep. She had seen in retrospect one of the warders, who had helped in the acting of the gruesome play, dressed as Satan with horns and tail and entering the hall with a bound and a whoop. His rôle was to snatch the President of the Tribunal and the Prosecutor from their seats and to drag them away with him into everlasting fire, while a weird voice boomed the query: "What hour is it?" and another replied: "Eternity."

Poor little Fleurette! It was her first experience of life. And what an experience! Yet, it had only been one step from Lou Mas with its almond-trees and rippling mill-streams, with Bibi and old Louise, one step from there to this barrack of a house converted into a prison, with all its humiliating propinquities, and all its horrors. Her companions in misfortune were very kind to her. All of them. The men as well as the women. Claire de Châtelard and the Comtesse de Mornas. They all seemed to understand her position, her helplessness, her ignorance. They were so kind! so kind! They admired her crochet-work, and talked to her of Laragne, or the snows of Pelvoux, or the almond-trees of the Dauphiné. They thanked her and kissed her when she offered to ply her needle for them: to mend their clothes or darn their stockings. Within a few days she became one of themselves. A younger sister in this family of the despairing. Within a week, or mayhap ten days, she had lost her sense of horror at their mummeries, could laugh at the antics of the mock Satan come to carry the mock judges off to hell. The only thing to which she could not get accustomed was the representation of the guillotine, the inverted chairs and the bits of red rags, the cords, the victim, the basket and the executioner. Oh! that executioner! He was terrible! Especially of late. The rôle, like that of Satan, had always been undertaken by one of the warders; rough fellows these, culled from the lowest scum of the city; men who delighted in all the physical and moral torture inflicted on the aristos under their charge, who would gloat over the sight of a father torn away from his children and led to the guillotine, who would regale the unfortunate prisoners with tales culled from the *Moniteur* of wholesale executions or brutal massacres. The idea of acting the part of executioner to the mock representations of the guillotine delighted a certain grim sense of humour which most Southerners possess. There was one man in particular, lately come to replace another who was sick, who threw himself into the gruesome rôle with zest. He would strip almost naked for the part, and then cover his face and his large body with a mixture of soot and charcoal and oil so that he looked like a huge negro, with gleaming teeth and long, lank hair, of a pale blond colour, speckled with dirt.

Poor Fleurette could not bear to look at him, nor at the mock execution when one or other of her fellow-prisoners would allow himself to be tied to the mock guillotine, amidst the well-acted laughter and jeers of men and women who impersonated the awful rabble that was always to be found around the real guillotine. It was horrible, and Fleurette would run out into the corridor, or back to her miserable paillasse, anywhere where she could shut her ears to that gruesome mockery.

Unfortunately there came a day when the warder declared that an order had come through, that prisoners must remain together in the hall during the hour of recreation. He said it was so, and there was no one to contradict him. Of all the tyrants that had been set over their fellow-men, these days, none were more dreaded because more autocratic, than prison-warders. As far as prisoners knew, these tyrants' power over them was absolute. In any case they could, if contradicted or thwarted, make it ten thousand times worse than before for those who did not cringe. This order then had to be obeyed and Fleurette, cowering alone in a corner of the hall, kept her eyes tightly shut while the impish scene was being enacted.

Madame de Mornas, aristocratic, dignified, with her arm round Eugénie Blanc's waist, spoke to her very kindly.

"My dear," she said in her gentle, well-bred voice, "if we did not make a mockery of all these horrors we should brood over them, and some of us would go mad."

And Eugénie Blanc, the "old clo" dealer's daughter, added with a shrug: "You dear innocent! You have seen nothing of life as it is. You don't know what it is when memory sets to work and you see things—you see——" She gave a shudder and then a harsh laugh. "This at any rate takes one's mind off memory for a time."

Claire de Châtelard's sympathy too was sincere, though rather more grim: "We've all got to go through the real thing presently; the mockery of it now will make the reality to-morrow more endurable."

"We must practise to-day," M. de St. Luce, the great scientist, said lightly, "our attitude of to-morrow."

That was the general tenor of every one's feelings upon the subject. Fleurette, touched by so much sympathy, tried to smile through her tears, and promised to school herself to the same philosophy. But as soon as all these kindly creatures had left her, in order to join, laughing, in the grim spectacle, she once more closed her eyes and sat in the dark corner, quite still, hoping that no one would notice her. But the laughter at one time was so loud, every one's mood so hilarious, that involuntarily she opened her eyes and looked. The mock executioner had just completed his task. It seems he was complaining that Madame la Guillotine was still unsatisfied: she was putting out her arms, ready to embrace another lover. M. de Bollène—a minor poet well known in Provence—was declaiming some verses of his own composition, in praise of that promised embrace. The executioner's coal-black face shone like polished ebony in the flickering light of the tallow candles that guttered in their sconces. Madame de Mornas, almost unrecognizable in ragged kirtle and with a crimson scarf tied round her head, was flourishing her knitting and humming the tune of the *Carmagnole* as an accompaniment to M. de Bollène's verses, whilst Claire de Châtelard sprawled at the foot of the mock guillotine with a red streak across her throat.

And suddenly, to her horror, Fleurette saw the executioner stride towards her corner.

"What?" he cried aloud, "tears? Tears are for aristos. To the guillotine with her!" or words to that effect. Fleurette did not rightly understand what he did say, all she knew was that this hideous, horrible man came striding towards her with hands outstretched, and that every one was laughing or singing or clapping their hands. The next moment she felt that horrible hand upon her shoulder, on her kerchief, her breast. She gave a loud scream and cowered further into the corner thinking that she would faint with terror, until she heard a peremptory voice calling our loudly: "Leave the child alone, man, can't you see she is frightened?"

"Frightened? Of course she is frightened," the loathsome creature retorted with a laugh. "Did I not say that she was an aristo? Let me just call the warder and——"

A woman's voice was raised in protest:

"No, no, don't call the warder. She's done nothing wrong—and he might——"

And Madame de Mornas it was who added:

"You coveted this ring this morning, man, it is yours if you leave the child alone and say nothing to the warder."

How kind people were! How kind! As nothing further seemed to happen, Fleurette ventured to open her eyes: Claire de Châtelard was sitting beside her, trying to comfort her. The gruesome play had apparently come to an end; the prisoners in groups of three or more stood about talking and laughing, preparatory to be driven back to the sleeping-rooms for the night. The black executioner was no longer there.

"He is not a bad man really," Claire de Châtelard said to Fleurette, fondling her hand and smoothing the golden curls that clung to her moist forehead! "only very rough and coarse. Bah! these men!" she went on with a shudder. "The warder is a veritable fiend: a genius in inventing means to punish you if you do not bribe him or give in to him. All my little treasures, which I was able to bring here with me, have gone into his rapacious hands. This man is not so bad, he is new to his work, he came a day or two ago to replace one who was ill. But he is only a scavenger. When the warder is dead drunk he takes his place, the rest of the time he does all the dirtiest work in the house. A loathsome creature, what? If he were not so big, we should not be so frightened of him. But he is better than the warder."

Fleurette only listened with half an ear. She still felt bruised and ill after the fright she had had. That horrible black hand touching her breast. It was worse than any nightmare.

She was glad when the bell clanged and the warder accompanied by his new aide—only partially relieved of the soot and the grime of his rôle—drove the prisoners like a herd of cattle back into their pens. So many women in one room, so many men in another. He had his list, and with a stout stick in his hand which he flourished as he read out the names, he drove them all in, into their respective night quarters and locked the doors upon them.

Fleurette shared her wretched paillasse with Claire de Châtelard. There was no dressing or undressing in this overcrowded room. No privacy. One just lay down in one's clothes and snatched what rest one could. Oh! the horror of it all to these women, most of them accustomed to dainty homes. Fleurette never knew which moment she dreaded most, that of opening her eyes to another awful day, or trying to close them in intermittent sleep.

Claire de Châtelard, less impressionable, was already asleep. Fleurette slipped out of her kirtle which she laid tidily across the foot of the paillasse; then she took off her muslin kerchief. As she did so something fluttered to the ground. A piece of paper neatly folded. Smothering an involuntary cry of surprise, she stooped to pick it up. Yet she hardly dared to touch the thing at first. How had it got between the folds of her kerchief? Who could possibly have put it there unbeknown to her? This was the second time within a very little while that Fleurette had come in contact with something that savoured of the supernatural. Still timorous, and with a trembling hand, she picked the paper up. Claire was asleep and most of the others had already stretched out their limbs upon their hard paillasses. No one paid any heed to Fleurette.

There was no direct light in the room itself, but an oil lamp which hung from the ceiling in the corridor threw a feeble ray of light through the fan-light over the door. Fleurette unfolded the paper and smoothed out its creases against her knee. She made her way to the centre of the room where she could just contrive, by that dim light from above, to decipher the handwriting upon the paper. But the first word that caught her eye, nearly caused her to utter a cry of joy; it was the signature: *Amédé.*

Amédé! At once her eyes grew dim with tears. Amédé! Those five letters in the clumsy, schoolboyish handwriting meant happiness and home. Amédé! Before trying to read further she pressed the paper against her cheek, fondled it, laid it against her lips.

Amédé! He had written to her. Where from? How? She did not care to think. What did it matter after all? He was thinking of her. Had written to her. And some divine messenger had conveyed his missive to Fleurette. Though he was safe and well—Bibi had assured her that he was—he had thought of her and sent her this letter through one of God's own angels.

And then Fleurette dried her eyes, for she remembered that presently the bell would clang again, when all the lights would be put out and she might have to wait until to-morrow to read Amédé's letter.

It was short, very, very short. Amédé had never been a scholar, but in it he told her how he adored his Fleurette and longed for her nearness. He also told her that whatever else happened, he implored her to trust the bearer of this note who would be the means of bringing her back one day to the shelter of his arms.

The bearer of this note? Who was he? Surely, surely, one of God's angels! and so of course she trusted him. And it was only *le bon Dieu* who would so guide Bibi that all this trouble would come to an end and she, Fleurette, would of a certainty find a shelter once more in her Amédé's arms.

She read and re-read the few brief lines over and over again, and presently when the bell clanged, and she was forced to make her way hurriedly to her paillasse before the room was plunged into utter darkness, she laid down on the hard straw with a little sigh of contentment and of peace. Her evening prayer was one entirely of gratitude to *le bon Dieu* for His gift of Amédé's love and Bibi's protection. And that night Fleurette slept quite soundly, with her cheek resting against the letter from Amédé.

26

SIR PERCY HITS BACK

For two whole days Citizens Pochart and Danou of the 137th Section of the Committee of Public Safety had been sorely puzzled. They had received a curt note from Representative Chauvelin telling them that he would be absent from Orange for a brief while, and bidding them suspend all business until his return. Suspend all business? In very truth all business was perforce at a standstill, not because of the absence of the representative on special mission, but because of that of two high officers of State: the President of the Tribunal and the Public Prosecutor.

Representative Chauvelin in his note had also alluded to this absence, stating that by direct orders from the Central Committee of Public Safety, President Legrange and Prosecutor Isnard had been obliged to proceed to Paris.

It was all very puzzling, not to say suspicious. Pochart and Danou put their heads together and came to the conclusion that here undoubtedly were some machinations at work on the part of Representative Chauvelin with a view to getting his daughter out of harm's way. The question was how to make use of these machinations. Of their knowledge that they were machinations. How in fact to turn them against the man who hitherto had carried himself with such consummate arrogance, lording it over every officer of State in Orange, with thinly-veiled threats that had roused ire, malice and hatred in these men, whose rule of life was "strike ere you yourself be struck."

One thing, however, was crystal-clear. Representative Chauvelin was hard hit. He put on an air of lofty indifference; he continued to bluster and to threaten, but he was hard hit by the arrest of his daughter, as indeed any family man would be. Pochart and Danou did not care one worthless assignat what became of the daughter, but they did feel that the pleasure of threatening and terrorizing the representative on special mission, perhaps even of dragging him down from his exalted position and sending him in his turn to the guillotine, was not one to be missed. Up to the hour when Lieutenant Godet had arrested the wench Fleurette on suspicion, Representative Chauvelin had been a living threat to every patriot in Orange. He seemed, as it were, to be always walking hand in hand with the guillotine, or else in its shadow; sheltered himself, yet a menace to others. But now the tables were reversed, and Pochart and Danou had in one hour learned to substitute threats for soft words, arrogance for servility. And they vastly enjoyed the substitution.

But the trouble was that they were void of imagination. Representative Chauvelin could be brought down, they knew that. But how? Judging other men by themselves, they quite envisaged the possibility of a father sacrificing his own daughter in order to save himself. And there was also the possibility that a representative on special mission was powerful enough to save both his daughter and himself. Strong forces would have to be marshalled against him. Pochart and Danou with heads together passed these forces in review.

There was Lieutenant Godet who hated Representative Chauvelin with a hatred born of fear—the deadliest hatred of all. There was that rat-faced little spy, Adèle, a mixture of petty spite and malice. She would be useful. Others might be found, for Representative Chauvelin had many enemies who had not until this hour dared to come out into the open, but who would readily show themselves once the powerful representative was attacked.

And in the meanwhile the business of purging the countryside of aristos, suspects and traitors was at a standstill. With no Public Prosecutor to frame indictments and no President to try the accused, the order: "Que la Terreur soit à l'ordre du jour": "Let Terror be the order of the day," had become a dead letter. This could not go on, of course. Pochart and Danou, quite apart from their schemes against Representative Chauvelin, felt that a solution must be found—and that quickly—for this impossible situation. If allowed to continue they stood in very great risk of a reprimand from Paris for allowing the business of the State to be at a standstill. They might be accused of want of zeal. Those great patriots up in Paris were so unreasonable, one never knew what they might do. Having sent for President Legrange and Public Prosecutor Isnard, they probably expected "the order of the day" to go on just the same. But how, *nom de nom*? How?

They were still seeking a solution, these two, Pochart and Danou, on the third morning, when to their surprise Representative Chauvelin walked in, as calm and indifferent as you please.

He had completed his business, he explained to them, sooner than he had anticipated. President Legrange and Public Prosecutor Isnard on the other hand had continued their journey to Paris.

Danou, suave as ever, expressed satisfaction at the return of the citizen representative. It was indeed a matter of congratulation, he added, for them all, seeing that the business of the State was so completely at a standstill.

Pochart was somewhat more emphatic.

"There are at least one hundred and sixty traitors," he said, "who should have been dealt with days ago. Your absence, citizen, and that of two other public servants should not have occurred at this critical hour——"

"It was inevitable, Citizen Pochart," Chauvelin broke in drily. "Orders from Paris, you know——"

"I was just proposing to Citizen Pochart," Danou put in mildly, "that we send a message to Paris by this new aerial telegraph to ask for further orders. There is one installed at Avignon, and a courier——"

"The aerial telegraph is required for more important business than yours, Citizen Danou," Chauvelin once more broke in, and this time with some impatience.

"What can be more important than the suppression of traitors?" Pochart argued with an obvious sneer. "I marvel at you, citizen representative, that you should think otherwise."

"The very latest decree of the National Convention," Danou added, "was that Terror be the order of the day. I too marvel at you, Citizen Chauvelin."

"There is no cause for marvel," Chauvelin rejoined with well-assumed indifference. "I have not been in Orange more than a few hours. I have not had time to devise for this new situation."

"Well then, to-morrow, citizen," Danou suggested, "will you be ready to consult with us on the best means of meeting this impossible situation? Otherwise, I am still of the opinion that the aerial telegraph, or perhaps a courier to Paris——"

He went on mumbling for a few seconds. His tone had been quite suave, not to say deferential; but Chauvelin's keen ear had not failed to detect the threat that lurked behind those smooth, velvety tones.

"To-morrow, as you say," he concluded drily.

All through the wearisome journey back from Valence he had been busy scheming and planning; alternately adopting and rejecting one plan after another. He knew well enough that Pochart and Danou were stalking him like wild beasts, ready to pounce on him, to come to grips with him in a life and death struggle in which his darling Fleurette would also be involved.

Now after his interview with the two men, he knew that already they scented victory, that they too were scheming and planning, planning his overthrow, and using Fleurette as the deadliest weapon against him. These last three years of titanic struggle of man against man, of the strong against the weak, of the weak against the strong, had taught him that he could expect nothing, neither mercy nor consideration, from enemies whom he himself would never have hesitated to sacrifice to his own whim or his own tyranny. His only hope lay in his avowedly superior brain-power. He no longer could dominate these snarling wild beasts, now that they were showing their fangs, but he could outwit them, before they sprang and devoured him. Brain-power as against blind lust. And Chauvelin thought that he could win.

27

SIR PERCY HITS BACK

Representative Chauvelin was quite calm, business-like, armed with sheaves of papers and documents, when he met his colleagues the following morning in the bureau of the Committee.

"I have found," he announced as soon as they were seated, "a solution to our difficulty."

"Ah!" Danou ejaculated simply. And Pochart also said "Ah," but in a different tone.

"I have here," Chauvelin continued, and selected an official document from the pile which he had deposited upon the table. "I have here a decree which exactly meets our case. It was promulgated by the National Convention on the motion of Citizen Cabot on the 6th of Brumaire last."

Leaning back in his chair, he began to read from the official document in his hand. The others, elbows on table, chin cupped in hand, listened with what we might call mixed feelings.

"Should it occur that through any cause whatsoever, one of the chief officers of State be absent from duty for a period exceeding seven days, the Representative on special mission shall then assume his functions and continue to discharge them for as long as seems expedient. And in the event of more than one important officer of State being so absent, the Representative on special mission shall himself appoint a substitute who will also discharge such duties as the Representative on special mission shall have assigned to him for the time being."

Having finished reading, Chauvelin put the document down, and with a gesture of finality let his thin, claw-like hand rest upon it.

"The decree is clear enough, methinks," he said coldly.

There was a pause. A silence lasting perhaps thirty seconds; then Danou said mildly:

"I have never heard of this decree."

"Nor I," Pochart echoed.

"The Central Committee in Paris," Chauvelin put in drily, "has often remarked on the strange ignorance displayed by avowed patriots of the decrees promulgated for the welfare of the State. The Committee deems that such ignorance almost amounts to treason."

"May I look at the document?" Danou rejoined simply, choosing to ignore the reprimand—and the thinly-veiled threat.

"Certainly," Chauvelin replied, and handed the document over to his colleague.

"Is it a copy?" Pochart asked, looking over his friend's shoulder.

"An attested copy, as you can see," Chauvelin replied. "It is countersigned by Citizens Robespierre, Billaud, Couthon and Saint Just. You are not thinking of disputing the order, Citizen Danou?"

Once more and still that arrogance, those veiled threats. The situation being entirely different from what it was yesterday, Danou and Pochart dared not persist in their mood of defiance. Not before they had consulted one another, marshalled those forces—Godet, Adèle, the proofs against the wench Fleurette—and decided on the mode of attack. Representative Chauvelin must have something up his sleeve, some hidden power, or he would not be so arrogant, so threatening.

Danou wiped the sweat from his bald cranium and handed the document back to Chauvelin. Pochart shaking himself like a wet dog, returned to his seat.

"I'll take over the office of President Legrange," Chauvelin said calmly, "and preside over the Tribunal until his return."

"Then I," Danou put in boldly, "had best take over the work of the Public Prosecutor."

"Impossible, citizen," Chauvelin rejoined firmly; "I must have a lawyer for that office."

"But——"

"You do not seem to have listened very carefully, Citizen Danou," Chauvelin broke in quietly, "to my reading of the decree, or you would remember that it is for the representative on special mission to appoint a substitute, in case of absence on the part of a second important officer of State."

"And whom do you propose to appoint, citizen representative?" Pochart inquired with a sneer.

"I will let you know my decision as to that to-morrow."

"The sooner the better, citizen representative," Danou concluded unctuously. "Remember that it is my colleague and I of the 137th Section of the Committee of Public Safety who will have to collect the evidence against the accused and place it before the Public Prosecutor whom you will appoint. That is a duty from which only the Central Committee can relieve us. There are one hundred and sixty prisoners," he went on slowly, "arrested under the Law of the Suspect. Some of them gravely accused, and by witnesses too."

"I am well aware of that, Citizen Danou," Chauvelin replied calmly. Not by the quiver of an eyelid did be betray the fact that the shaft had gone home. With a perfectly steady hand he collected his papers and placed a weight upon them. After which he dismissed the others with a curt nod.

"Your pardon, citizens," he said, "I have still work to do. You too doubtless. I shall require your attendance here to-morrow at this same hour."

When the door had finally closed behind the two men, the mask fell from Chauvelin's face. Leaning his elbow on the table, he buried his burning head in his hands; a heartrending groan broke from his parched lips, his eyes felt as if seared with glowing charcoal! Ah! if he had not only forgotten these years past how to pray, what fervent orisons would he not have sent heavenwards at this hour. Help! where could he find help out of this web which his enemies had woven round him? How he hated them! longed to smite them before they had time to accomplish their fell purpose. They had determined on striking at Fleurette. Out of revenge or hatred, or was it fear? they had determined on striking at him, Chauvelin, through this being whom he loved beyond everything in the world. And he who had been one of the first protagonists of hatred and revenge and mutual distrust, he who had the will and the power, seemed so inextricably enmeshed that he could do nothing to save her. Fight? he would fight, inch by inch, step by step. Fight to save his Fleurette. Fight while he had breath in his body; fight until he fell vanquished by her side. For if he failed he would not let her die alone. He could not think of her being dragged through the streets in that awful tumbril which he himself had so often helped to fill; could not—heavens above no—could not think of her mounting the steps of the guillotine, which so many innocent feet had mounted at his bidding. Retribution! It had come nearer, more inexorable now! Death by his Fleurette's side seemed the only possible issue.

And even as he sat there alone, in that room wherein the hatred of his fellow-men seemed still to linger like noisome ghosts, a pale ray of sunlight found its way through the closed window and played upon the myriads and myriads of dust atoms that hovered in the air. Chauvelin's hands dropped down upon the table. His weary eyes rested vacantly upon that shaft of dust-laden light. And inside its very heart he saw a face, smiling and debonair, with lazy eyes and smiling lips mocking him in his grief. It was a vision, gone as soon as seen, but vivid enough during that one brief second to bring a savage curse upon the lonely man's lips. His claw-like hand clenched so tightly that the knuckles shone like polished ivory.

"My evil genius!" he muttered through his teeth. "Had I succeeded in bringing you down, had I seen that mocking head fall under the guillotine, this devastating misery would never have come upon me. If only I could be even with you, I would die happier —even now."

28

SIR PERCY HITS BACK

Ever afterwards to Chauvelin, it seemed as if the Scarlet Pimpernel had heard his challenge, and come in response to his thoughts: for hardly had a couple of days gone before the first rumour reached him of the nearness of his arch-enemy. Twenty-four hours later the hue and cry was all over Orange after a gang of English spies who, it was averred, made it their business to cheat Madame la Guillotine out of her dues.

Citizen Pochart brought Representative Chauvelin the news which already was all over the town, namely that Architect Caristie and his family, consisting of his wife and the small son now aged ten, who was destined one day to become one of Orange's most distinguished citizens, had unaccountably disappeared from their tumble-down lodgings in the Rue de la République, where they had taken refuge after their house had been requisitioned by the State and turned into a prison-house.

For some time the Sectional Members of the Committee of Public Safety, Citizens Pochart and Danou, ardent patriots, had had their eyes on the Caristie family. Aristos, what? Architect Caristie had designed and built houses in the past for tyrants and ci-devants. The arrest of the entire family had been decided on. It was to have taken place that very evening. Orders to that effect were out, their place of incarceration fixed in the very house where they had once sat in luxury, whilst patriots had starved outside their gates.

And suddenly the news had spread like wildfire through the town that Architect Caristie, his wife and son had disappeared. Disappeared? Where? asked every patriot. But no one knew. One evening they had still been seen, as usual, taking walking exercise on the river-bank, and the next day when the soldiers of the revolutionary army presented themselves at the door of their lodgings in the Rue de la République and demanded admittance, lo! they received no answer: the lodgings were deserted, the birds had flown from their nests. Nor could the guard at any of the gates of the city throw light upon this mysterious occurrence. No one had passed the gates without duly authenticated passes. Pochart was at his wits' end and asked counsel of Representative Chauvelin. What was to be done in face of this mystery? Exercise strict supervision at the gates, Chauvelin advised. All passes in future to be signed by himself as well as by the Sectional Members of the Committee of Public Safety.

The news of the presence of the Scarlet Pimpernel in Orange had acted upon his nerves like a whiplash. Fate, it seemed, was hitting at him from every side: and he felt like a fighter who has been downed once, twice, and then suddenly feels the strength of giants in his blood; the agility of a cat spurring him to a new and stupendous effort. In a vague, fatalistic kind of way the safety of Fleurette and the destruction of the Scarlet Pimpernel appeared to him as inextricably involved. If he allowed his arch-enemy to baffle him now and here, in this city, then Fleurette was doomed and he himself must perish.

This was the immediate state of mind into which the news of the nearness of the Scarlet Pimpernel had thrown him. A wild desire to link the destruction of his enemy with the safety of his child, to deserve so well of the State, in fact, that the life of Fleurette would be ceded to him as a reward. A drowning man will catch at a straw, and so did Chauvelin catch at this hope, cling to it, turn the thought over and over in his mind. With feverish activity then he spurred those about him into additional vigilance, combated that superstitious terror with which every official these days regarded the gang of English spies and their mysterious chief. He brought to every man's notice the handsome reward offered by the Revolutionary Government for the capture of the Scarlet Pimpernel, described the Englishman's appearance, his methods, his motives, worked up every man in Orange, aye, and every woman too, into a state of enthusiasm for the possible capture of this inveterate and daring enemy of France.

But this particular frame of mind was not destined to endure. Soon memory got to work, recalled unpleasant moments in Calais, Boulogne, in Paris, in Nantes. What if here too, in Orange, the Scarlet Pimpernel should triumph and he, Chauvelin, once more be forced to eat the bread of humiliation? What if baffled once more, he should lose, at one terrible swoop, both his revenge and his last hope of saving Fleurette? And then it was that first the insidious, the stupendous thought penetrated his brain. Was it Satan himself who had whispered it into his ear? or some army of mocking imps intent upon torturing him to madness? But heavens above, what a thought! The Scarlet Pimpernel and Fleurette! Was that going to be the solution of this terrible impasse?

The thought feverishly driven back at first, returned more insistent. Why not? And then again, why not? A young girl, sweet, pretty, innocent, was she not one to arouse those instincts of chivalry which Chauvelin had hitherto affected to despise?

What a possibility! Heavens above, what a possibility! His very senses reeled now at the thought. But he allowed his mind to dwell upon it, to weigh its possibilities: to familiarize itself more and more with it. At first it had seemed like madness, but no longer now! His Fleurette! Already Amédé Colombe was far away, under the protection of the Scarlet Pimpernel, what more likely than that—— No! no! it could not be! His daughter! His, Chauvelin's! And in a swift vision he saw himself luring Marguerite Blakeney, the beloved and beautiful wife of the Scarlet Pimpernel to her death, holding her as hostage, threatening her, torturing her. His enemy's wife! What agonies she had endured at his hands! And now Fleurette! Would not the Scarlet Pimpernel, triumphant and revengeful, gloat over her death, rather than raise a finger to save her life? Would he not gaze with joy on the misery endured by his bitterest foe?

And then once more torturing thoughts would assail him: torturing fears and torturing hopes, hopes? Yes, hopes! "Why should you not hope, man?" whispered an insidious demon in his ear: "the Scarlet Pimpernel does not know, cannot know that Fleurette is your daughter; the daughter of his enemy Armand Chauvelin. To him she is just the sweet, pretty, innocent victim of a system of government which he hates and which he combats. Then why not hope?" And the floating, racking visions of Juliette Marny, and Yvonne de Kernogan, of the Abbé

Foucquet and Madeleine Lanoy, would once more haunt the day-dreams of this man already steeped in misery, and hope insidious, ever-living hope, would whisper in its turn: "To that long list of innocents snatched from prison and from death by the insolent adventurer whom you hate, why should not the name of Fleurette be added? Fleurette of unknown parentage, just a sweet girl dwelling at Lou Mas, with old Louise and a father known as Armand? Why not?"

And day after day, whilst presiding, self-appointed, over a tribunal of infamy, Chauvelin's mind became more and more familiarized with the vision of his Fleurette snatched out of the jaws of death by the man with the lazy eyes and the mocking lips, the demmed, elusive Pimpernel of his day-dreams and his sleepless nights.

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SIR PERCY HITS BACK

MEANWHILE in Architect Caristie's house, transformed for the necessities of the State into a prison, the old routine is now restored. Daily, once more, an hour before sunset, the captain of the guard with his half-dozen men, enters the courtyard, and in a loud voice reads the names that appear upon his Roll-call. They are the names of those who on the morrow are summoned before the Revolutionary Tribunal, there to answer the charges that are trumped up against them by the venal spies, who make their living out of the blood of innocent men and women and children.

Impossible to refute those charges, since the law has decreed that it is a crime to be merely suspected of treason against the State. Foucquier-Tinville, the great Public Prosecutor in Paris, no longer troubles, it seems, to prepare fresh indictments against every accused in turn. He has a printed formula of accusation, with just the name left in blank, presently to be filled in as convenience arises. Therefore in other greater and lesser cities of France, patriots desirous of showing their zeal, can do no better than emulate the example set by so great a man. Local sections of the Committee of Public Safety prepare the indictments—set formulæ with the names left in blank. These they pass on to the Public Prosecutor who mumbles as he reads them before the Tribunal with the President sitting up on the dais, and the accused—names left in blank—brought up to the bar, not allowed to say a word in their own justification, nor to question the witnesses brought up to testify against them.

Abandon all hope then, ye whose names are upon that Roll-call! to-morrow the Tribunal, the next day the guillotine! And once again now, day after day, the captain of the guard comes to the house, late of Architect Caristie, and reads; and at all the windows that overlook the courtyard heads appear, men, women and little children—clutching the bars and listening. Listening for their own name or that of one who is dear. Sighing with relief if neither has been called, or with resignation if to-morrow is destined to bring this miserable existence to an end.

And day after day Chauvelin presides over this tribunal of infamy. Self-appointed, he sits upon the dais and sees before him pass a daily file of doomed, and dying. Sometimes ten, sometimes as many as twenty in a day, and still the prisons are full—fresh arrests made up for those whom the guillotine has claimed. Acquittals are rare, for moderation now has become a crime. Danton—aye! even Danton, the lion, has perished, he who ordered the September massacres, he who thundered forth from the tribune, "Liberty! Fraternity! Equality! or Death!" he has perished because he became guilty of this crime of moderation. The glorious revolution has no use for two such of its products as Danton and Robespierre—for the reality of the one and the canting hypocrisy of the other: so Danton it was who perished. "It is right," he had dared to say once, "to repress the Royalists: but we should not confound the innocent with the guilty!"

"And who told thee," Robespierre retorted, sea-green with hatred, "that one single innocent has perished by our hand?"

And because Danton had dared to raise his voice in the cause of the innocent, Danton had perished.

What chance then has Chauvelin to defend his Fleurette? His power is great. He can make or unmake your Pocharts and your Danous, your President Legrange or Public Prosecutor Isnard, but he cannot accord special privileges in prison for his own daughter. He cannot see her in private, comfort her, warn her if need be, tell her not to be afraid, for Bibi chéri is there, on the watch, ready to protect her with his body, to stand by her in the last hour. He cannot. Pochart and Danou are on the watch. "We must not confound the innocent with the guilty:" Danton had dared to say. And for this he had perished: and though he perished, could not save one single innocent.

And all evening, after the sittings of the Tribunal are over, and ten—or mayhap fifteen or twenty—condemned to the guillotine, Chauvelin like a pale, thin ghost haunts the purlieus of Architect Caristie's house. On pretext of his office he enters the courtyard with the captain of the guard and looks up at the windows to see if *she* is there. Once he saw her: just her little face peeping behind the opulent shoulders of one Claire de Châtelard, the best noted strumpet in Orange. The woman had one arm round Fleurette's waist and when the captain of the guard read out the name of Claire known as Châtelard upon his list, Fleurette threw her arms round her, and laid her head upon the trollop's breast.

Chauvelin turned away from the spectacle with a groan, and all night he lay awake thinking of his sweet flower laying her head upon the breast of a Claire de Châtelard.

Yet Claire de Châtelard bore herself bravely before him the next day, and when, on the day after that, he watched her from the window of the Hôtel de Ville mounting the steps of the guillotine, saw her standing there, superb and defiant with a coarse jest upon her sensual lips, he gloated over the thought that his Fleurette would no longer pillow her innocent head upon that breast. He tried to picture her, grieving for this friend, the propinquity, the squalor of that house of detention, from which there was but one egress, that egress the gate of Death. Claire de Châtelard to-day—Fleurette when? Every day the indictments are sent up to him for examination, the printed forms of accusation with the names left in blank, to be filled in as convenience demands: and every day a list of ten, perhaps fifteen names are sent along with these printed forms, and it is his business to direct the Public Prosecutor, a man of his own choosing, which of these names are to be inserted in the blank spaces, on the forms of accusation. Up to now he has been able to keep Fleurette's name out, but it has been sent up to him on two consecutive days. The fight then was getting at close quarters.

Pochart and Danou were pressing him, showing their teeth like snarling dogs ready to spring. And time was hurrying on. Time would presently bring back President Legrange and Prosecutor Isnard from Paris, time would inevitably bring to light his machinations for keeping those two men out of the way. Aye! time was hurrying on, and Fleurette's name had twice appeared upon the list.

And for the past three days not a word in the town about the English spies. After Architect Caristie and his family, it had been the widow Colmars and her daughter, and then General Paulieu and his family. Disappeared as if the earth had swallowed them up. Always traitors and aristos whose arrest was imminent, whose subsequent condemnation certain. But after that, three days' respite: the Scarlet Pimpernel and his gang seemed to have disappeared in their turn. The hopes which insidious demons had whispered in Chauvelin's ears were once more merged in a sea of despair. He derided himself for these hopes, lashed himself into a state of fury against himself for having allowed his mind to dwell upon them.

One scheme after another now did he devise and then reject. He would defy his enemies, the jury, the populace: loudly denounce the witnesses against Fleurette as liars and perjurers, pronounce her acquittal in the face of all opposition. Had he not made a point day after day of pronouncing acquittal on one or the other of the accused? just to test his power—to see how his enemies would behave? And he saw them lying low. Sneering. Whispering. Ogling him and laughing. They knew! They saw behind his schemes and his hopes. They reserved their counter-attack. They could afford to wait, whilst he could not.

If only Fleurette bore herself well: did not allow herself to be carried away with admissions or inconsidered words, out of sentiment for that fool Amédé Colombe. Chauvelin longed to see her, if only to impress this one thing upon her; to say nothing. To admit nothing. To hold her tongue and to trust chéri Bibi. If only she did that, he felt that he might save her yet. And obsessed by this idea, devoured with the desire to convey this message to her, without compromising her or giving yet another advantage to his enemies, Chauvelin at evening would wander like a restless ghost through the city.

That afternoon after he watched Claire de Châtelard mount the steps of the guillotine, a joke upon her lips, this restlessness became exquisite torture, and racked with tumultuous thoughts, wrapped in a black mantle, he sallied forth into the streets. It was now early in June: nearly three weeks since that last care-free day, Fleurette's eighteenth birthday, spent with her over at Lou Mas, when the scent of almond-blossom had been in the air and the nightingale had sung in the old walnut-tree. The day had been sunless and chilly, after sunset the rain began to fall. But rain and weather held no terrors for Chauvelin in his present mood. Holding his mantle tightly round his shoulders and pulling his hat down over his eyes, he wandered aimlessly through the streets, over the river and back again, down unpaved streets and lonely lanes, now and then sitting down to rest in some obscure little outlying café, where no one knew or heeded him, and then starting off again on his restless course. But always drifting back instinctively to the purlieus of Architect Caristie's house.

Almost opposite to it there was a small café: no one sitting outside because of the rain, but the interior lighted up, and sounds of merriment proceeding from within. Chauvelin thought of going inside, feeling that if he sat down there, close to the window, he could watch the walls behind which lived and suffered his little Fleurette. He did not dare go in for fear of being recognized. He was just debating within himself whether he would go or stay, when he saw a man come out of the house of Architect Caristie, cross over to the café, then disappear behind its creaking door. A scavenger, no doubt, ragged and dirty—not a warder, he was too ill-clad for that—just a scavenger—but perhaps he had seen Fleurette. The thought fascinated Chauvelin. His mind clung to it: turned it over and over. The thought that here was a man who perhaps had seen Fleurette within the last few minutes, had swept corridor or staircase when she was passing by. And with that thought there was still the burning desire to send her a message, to tell her to be brave and trust in Bibi, but above all, oh! above all, not to be led into making any admission about those valuables belonging to Madame de Frontenac, or about her association with Amédé Colombe.

Chauvelin, leaning against the wall which faced the little café, dwelt on his thoughts and his desire. He allowed the rain to drip upon his hat and upon his shoulders from the roof above him. He no longer felt restless. He just wanted to stand there and watch for the return of the man, who perhaps would be seeing Fleurette again within the next few minutes. He wondered if he dare approach him, always with the idea of possibly conveying a message to Fleurette. But the fear that the man might know who he was, deterred him from entering the café himself. He had been a fairly conspicuous figure in the courtyard of Caristie's house, standing by the side of the captain of the guard: if that scavenger was at work in the corridor, he might have looked out of the window and seen him, learned who he was. All through he had been at pains to show an indifferent attitude before his enemies: if this man happened to be a spy, would the knowledge that he, Chauvelin, was trying to establish communication with Fleurette compromise him hopelessly and do no good to her?

As he stood there, pondering and debating what he had better do, he saw the scavenger come out of the café. For a minute or two the man stood at the door, his hands buried in the pockets of his ragged breeches, contemplating the rain. The next moment another equally dirty and bedraggled ruffian came down the street, paused at the entrance of the café and passed the time of day with the scavenger. The two mudlarks remained talking for a few moments, after which they parted, each going his own way. The scavenger recrossed the road and entered the Caristie House. The other passed on in the opposite direction and Chauvelin, after an instant's hesitation, followed him. He came up with the man at the angle of the Rue Longue: and putting out his arm, touched him on the shoulder. With a cry of terror the man fell on his knees.

"Mercy! I've done nothing!" he babbled almost incoherently.

"I dare say not," Chauvelin said drily, "but it will be to thine advantage if thou'lt come along quietly with me."

He seized the man by the arm and dragged him up from his knees. The poor wretch tried to wriggle himself free, but Chauvelin held him tightly, and without another word drew him within the shelter of the nearest doorway. Fortunately, though the man kept up a ceaseless litany of lamentations and cries for mercy, he did so under his breath, thus creating no disturbance nor exciting the attention of the few passers-by who were hurrying homewards through the rain-swept streets.

"Are you willing, citizen," Chauvelin began abruptly, as soon as he had assured himself that the doorway was deserted and no eavesdropper nigh, "are you willing to earn fifty livres tournoi?"

The man gave no immediate reply, it seemed as if he was shaking himself free from his first terror and pondering over this extraordinary proposal, so different to what he had anticipated. Then he cleared his throat, expectorated, slowly repeated the magic words: "Fifty livres tournoi!" and finally added in an awed whisper:

"I have not seen five livres tournoi for months."

"Fifty are yours, citizen, if you'll render me a service."

"What is it?"

"That friend of yours, to whom you spoke just now—outside the Café de la Lune——"

"Citizen Rémi?"

"He works in the Caristie House?"

"Yes."

"In what capacity?"

"Cleaner," the man replied laconically. "Rémi hung about for days trying to earn a bit of money. He hasn't a sou, you understand? Same as me. A few days ago one of the inside men fell sick. Rémi presented himself and got the work. I know him well."

"He has access to the prisoners?" Chauvelin asked.

"I suppose so."

"Then tell him that there will be fifty livres for him too if he will convey a written message to number 142 in room 12."

Again the man seemed to ponder: weighing the risks probably, and also the gain. Fifty livres tournoi! Immense. He had forgotten that there was such a sum of money left in the world: and then for him to have the handling of it! This led him once more to expectorate, which action apparently had the effect of stimulating his brain-power.

"It could be done," he murmured at last.

"It can be done," Chauvelin asserted emphatically, "but must be done quickly, or——"

"Rémi will be back at the Café de la Lune soon after eight o'clock. He always goes there for a sip of something after supper."

"Good! Then you can meet him at that hour and tell him to wait for you, then come at once and find me here, under this doorway. I'll have the letter ready——"

"The whole thing is very risky, citizen," the man demurred.

"If it were not," Chauvelin rejoined drily, "I would not spend one hundred livres tournoi in the attempt."

"Fifty livres is not overmuch, when one risks one's neck."

"You are not risking your neck," Chauvelin retorted, "as you well know. And you'll not get more from me than fifty livres each. Take it or leave it."

He knew how to deal with these mudlarks, apparently, for the man after he had spat once more once or twice, seemed satisfied.

"I'll be back here," he said laconically, "after I have seen Rémi again."

Then Chauvelin let him go. The darkness and the rain soon swallowed him up: but Chauvelin himself remained for quite a while standing motionless under the doorway. He had not yet burnt his boats, was still free, if he thought the risk too great, to fail in his appointment. The man did not know who he was, had not seen him in the darkness and under the wide brim of his hat: but there was the risk that this Rémi might be a spy, who would take the letter intended for Fleurette straightway to Pochart or Danou. The letter might thus betray him and so minimize his power of saving Fleurette. He had to safeguard himself against the merest breath of suspicion in order to keep his power. The more irreproachable, detached, incorruptible he appeared before the populace, the more Spartan in his attitude towards his own child until the day of her trial, the greater his chance of saving her at the last. But his desire to warn her against unconsidered words or any kind of admissions outweighed for the moment every other consideration. He hurried back to his lodgings through the rain, and at once sat down to pen his letter to the child.

"My beloved one," he began, "at last I am able to send a word to you, which I hope and trust will reach your darling little hands. Child of my heart, this is to entreat you to continue in your trust of me, for I swear to you by the memory of your dead mother, that while you trust me I can save you. I can save the man you love. Moreover, I entreat you, beloved child of my soul, do not make any admission when brought before the tribunal, as you must be shortly, alas! If witnesses testify against you, just hold your peace; if others question you, deny everything. This I entreat you to do for the sake of the love I bear you, for the sake of the tears I have shed these past weeks, ever since your folly hath brought you to this pass."

He signed the letter "Bibi." Thus he had mentioned no names and in addition taken the precaution of disguising his writing as far as he was able. After which he sealed the letter and slipped it in the inner pocket of his coat. Time was now hanging heavily. Like a beast in its cage, Chauvelin paced up and down the narrow room, his hands clenched behind his back, a world of soul agony expressed upon his wax-like face.

As soon as he heard the tower-clock of Notre Dame strike eight, he picked up his hat and cloak and once more sallied forth into the streets.

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A QUARTER of an hour later two out-at-elbows ragamuffins met inside the Café de la Lune. Outside the rain had not abated: both the men who were clad in what were little more than rags, appeared soaked through to the skin. At this hour the little café was almost deserted. Citizen Sabot, the proprietor, was sitting at one table with a couple of friends; at another a couple of road-menders were sipping their absinthe, when the scavenger from the prison-house came slouching in. He sat down on the bench against the wall in the darkest corner of the room and ordered a bottle of wine for himself and a friend. Presently the latter came and joined him, and for a while the two men sat drinking in silence. Soon an animated discussion arose between the proprietor and his friends on the respective merits of Vouvray and Beaujolais as a table wine.

This entailed much shouting and copious gesticulations. Sabot had a deep-booming voice which reverberated from end to end of the room and caused the window-panes to rattle in their frames.

The scavenger from the prison-house had apparently drunk more during the day than was good for him. His head leaned heavily on his hand, his elbow resting upon the table, his eyes had become bleary, his speech uncertain. His friend sat opposite to him with his back to the rest of the company, and when Sabot's voice roused the echoes in the small stuffy room, he leaned forward and whispered in the other's ear:

"I had an adventure after I left you this afternoon."

"Eh?" the scavenger murmured incoherently. "Where?"

"At the angle of the Rue Longue I was pounced upon in the darkness and dragged under the shelter of a doorway. A man had me by the shoulder. He had seen me talking with you. He offered me fifty livres and the same for you, if you will give a letter to a certain prisoner in there."

And he nodded in the direction of the high walls of the Caristie House. His friend's reply to this preliminary statement was a prolonged snore.

"The prisoner to whom you are to give the letter is number 142 in room 12," the other went on, still speaking below his breath. "Who is that? Do you know?"

The scavenger from the prison-house waited for a moment or two until the discussion at the next table was specially loud-tongued, then he murmured:

"Yes! It is the girl Fleurette."

"Ah!" remarked his friend.

"Who was the man who spoke to you?"

"I don't know. It was pitch-dark. He wore a broad-brimmed hat and spoke in a hoarse whisper."

"Her father, probably. The man Armand. I have marvelled why we did not hear from him before. What have you arranged?"

"That I meet him under the same doorway, after I've seen you. He will then give me the letter."

"We'll keep to that then. But try and see the man. I might recognize him by your description."

He paused for a moment or two, yawned, stretched, emptied his mug of wine and then went on. "If I went myself I might scare him off. So it is best you should go. But try and see his face. I'll wait here till you come."

After which he ordered another bottle of wine. Sabot broke away from his friends in order to serve his customer.

"You've had about as much as you ought to have, Citizen Rémi," he said drily, as he uncorked the bottle and set it on the table.

"That is none of your business, citizen," Rémi retorted with a bibulous laugh, "so long as I pay for what I drink."

He threw some coins on the table. Sabot picked them up with a shrug and then rejoined his friends, and resumed the discussion with them on the merits or demerits of Vouvray and Beaujolais. The other ruffian took the opportunity of shuffling out of the café, and the scavenger, sprawling over the table, composed himself to sleep.

Hugging the walls, the other slunk through the street till he came to the doorway, where effectively he had appointed to meet Chauvelin.

"Well!" the latter queried impatiently as soon as the other came in sight. Have you seen your friend?"

"Yes."

"Does he agree?"

"Yes."

With a sigh of relief Chauvelin drew the sealed letter from his breast pocket.

"Fifty livres, remember," he said slowly, "for each of you, when you bring me back the answer."

"Oh!" the man exclaimed, visibly disappointed. "There's an answer then?"

"Yes! An answer. Your friend will see to it that you bring me back either an answer or some token which will satisfy me that the letter is in the right hands."

The man gave a short laugh.

"You do not trust me, citizen," he said.

"No," Chauvelin replied laconically. "I do not."

"I do not blame you," the other retorted. "I do not trust you altogether either. How do I know, when Rémi and I have risked our lives in your service, that the money will be forthcoming?"

"You do know that, citizen," Chauvelin rejoined drily, "and anyway you are bound to take that risk."

"Why should I?" the man retorted.

"Because you are more sorely in need of money than I of your services."

This argument appeared unanswerable. At any rate the ruffian now said with a light laugh:

"Have it your own way. Give me the letter. Number 142 in room 12 shall have it, you can wager your shirt on that."

Without another word Chauvelin handed him the letter. It was so dark under the doorway that it was only by groping that the other was able to get hold of it. He drew so near to Chauvelin that the latter, fearing that the man was trying to have a close look at him, pulled his hat lower down over his eyes. The other resorted to his habitual expression of indifference by spitting upon the floor; then he slipped the letter underneath his ragged blouse.

"Where do I find you," he asked, "after Rémi has done your errand?"

"You will go into the Rue Longue," Chauvelin replied, "to the house of Citizen Amouret, the chandler. Up the first flight of stairs, on the right-hand side, you will come to a door which is painted a slate-grey. Knock at that door and you will find me within."

"At what hour?"

"At any time to-morrow after the executions in the Place de la République," Chauvelin replied.

31

To say that Fleurette had in the past few days become familiarized with the grim mummeries that went on in the common room, would be putting it rather strongly. But she certainly had no longer the same horror of them as she had had at first. The presentment of the mock guillotine still harrowed her, it is true, but she could not help laughing at the antics of the mock Satan and his satellites when they seized the President of the Tribunal and the Public Prosecutor by the feet and dragged them off to an imaginary hell. There was that one man in particular whom she had sometimes noticed before and who was aide to one of the warders, he was very diverting. She used to watch him turning and wriggling his huge body, which he had painted all over with soot and draped in bits of red rags. He made an ideal Satan with tail and horns complete, and sometimes it seemed to Fleurette as if he went through all his antics for the sole purpose of bringing a smile upon her lips. Moreover, in a vague kind of way, she associated him with that lovely letter from Amédé, which she had found inside the folds of her kerchief one evening.

The death of so many who had been her prison-companions at first, especially that of Claire de Châtelard, had deeply affected her. The want of fresh air, of exercise, and above all of love and joy, had begun to affect her health: her cheeks had lost their freshness, her eyes their lustre, her lips their smile.

It was only in the recreation hour that she would smile sometimes. Always when the big, clumsy, hideous-looking fellow who was some kind of aide to one of the warders, set himself the task of fooling for her benefit. She came to look upon him as a friend, and remembering how mysteriously that letter from Amédé had come inside her kerchief, she would look up whenever he came near her, wondering if he had another such welcome message for her. And one evening—she really had not the least idea how it happened—she found a sealed letter inside her work-basket. And the letter was from chéri Bibi. Oh! the joy of it! The joy! She read, and re-read it, and kissed the paper whereon his dear hand had rested. How she had missed Bibi all these days! How she longed to reassure him that she was well and that she trusted and believed in him! As to obeying him in all things, of course she would do it. To begin with, she was not afraid, not the least bit in the world. He was watching over her, and he was so great and powerful that no danger could possibly assail her while he cared for her. She would indeed obey him in all things, hold her peace while that wicked Adèle tried to do her harm; she would hold her peace before the Tribunal just as *le bon Jésus* had done when he was questioned by his judges.

Oh! it was a dear, a comforting, an infinitely precious letter. And beside it Fleurette had found a tiny little slip of paper on which were scribbled the words: "Let me have something to take back to the writer, to let him know that you are well. Leave it in your work-basket, and I will see to it that he gets it." And so Fleurette had written a few lines to chéri Bibi; told him that she was well, and assured him that she was not afraid and would obey his commands in all things. She would hold her peace and trust in him. This little note she had hidden that evening in her work-basket and by noon on the following day it had gone.

32

SIR PERCY HITS BACK

"But me no buts, my dear Tony, I am sick of all these filthy rags. And if I am to see pretty Fleurette's papa then must I see him decently clad and in my right mind."

So spake Sir Percy Blakeney to his friend, late the following evening, it was in an attic under the roof of a half-derelict house in the Rue du Pont close to the river-bank. The owners of the house had long since disappeared, fled into the mountains or perished on the guillotine; no one knew or cared. Blakeney, and those members of his league who were with him, had hit upon it on their arrival in Orange, had made the attic their head-quarters, whilst most of the vagabonds of the city used the rest of the house as their lair. They too were outwardly vagabonds, dressed in rags, appeared unkempt, unshaven, and unwashed, when they sallied forth in the early mornings each on an errand of mercy to succour those in need of help or those who were in danger or distress.

It was only o' nights, sometimes, that an overwhelming desire for cleanliness and nice clothes caused these English gentlemen to cast aside their rags and to venture out into the open dressed in clothes that would have caused the ragamuffins of Orange to snarl at their heels like so many hungry curs.

They had been eight days in Orange now, and already Architect Caristie, with his wife and small son, the widow Colmars and her daughter, and poor old General Paulieu with his family owed their safety to this gallant League of the Scarlet Pimpernel. But there was still more to do.

"We must get that child Fleurette out of that hell," the chief had said, and since then brain and heart had been at work to find the means to that end.

Later on Lord Tony had remarked: "I wish we could find out about that father of hers; this man Armand. He seems to hold some kind of position under this government of assassins, but I for one have tried in vain to learn something more definite about him."

"I think," Sir Andrew Ffoulkes added, "that his position must be a high one, or the girl would have been brought to trial before now."

"Unless our amiable friend, M. Chauvelin, has got this Armand under lock and key somewhere else," was my Lord Stowmaries' comment upon the situation.

Sir Percy was silent. Frankly the position puzzled him. He would have liked to get into touch with the man Armand, but for once he and his friends were baffled by this anonymity which appeared so closely guarded. Great then had been the rejoicing in the attic of the derelict house in the Rue du Pont, when Lord Antony Dewhurst—a most perfect type of ruffian in rags and a thick coating of grime—related his adventure with the mysterious individual who, under cover of darkness and rain, had offered him and his friend Rémi fifty livres each for delivering a message to a prisoner, who was none other than little Fleurette.

"At last we'll get in touch with the mysterious Armand," they all declared eagerly. It was arranged that the chief would himself take Fleurette's reply to the house in the Rue Longue. But go on this errand in the filthy rags of a scavenger he would not.

"The night is pretty dark," he declared, "and I would rather the mysterious Armand saw me as I am. I may also have a chance," he added with his merriest laugh, "of coming across my good friend M. Chambertin. It is some weeks since last we met, and not to have had a pleasant chat with him all these days, while we were within a stone's throw of one another, has been a sore trial to me. I caught a glimpse of him a day or two ago, in the courtyard of the Caristie House. He looked to be sick and out of sorts. A sight of me might cheer him up."

"You won't take any risks, Blakeney," Sir Andrew Ffoulkes remarked.

"Any number, my dear fellow," Sir Percy replied laughing. "And you know you envy me, you dog. But I feel thoroughly selfish to-night. I mean to take the note to Armand myself, and I mean to take the privilege of having a little chat with my friend

Chambertin. And both these things I am going to do as an English gentleman and not as a mudlark in stinking, filthy rags."

He had completed his toilet now, looked magnificent in clothes cut by the leading London tailor, which set off his splendid figure to perfection, with snow-white stock and speckless boots.

"If a single pair of eyes should see you," Sir Andrew insisted, with an anxious sigh.

"I should have a whole pack of wolves at my heels," Blakeney admitted. "But that wouldn't be the first time any of us have had to run for our lives, eh? nor the first time we gave an entire pack of them the slip."

He picked up his hat and took a last look at Fleurette's little note which he had to deliver at the house in the Rue Longue.

"This man Armand must be a very decent fellow," he mused, "his letter to the child was really fine in spirit as well as in affection. Yes! he must be a decent fellow and we must get the girl for his sake as much as for that of our friend Colombe. What?"

On that, of course, they were all agreed. The activities of the League, since the rescue of General Paulieu and his family, were centred now on Fleurette. There were still one or two minor points to discuss, arrangements of detail to complete, but the main project for the girl's rescue could not be determined until it was definitely known whether her father, Armand, was going to be a help or a hindrance.

"Anyway, I shall know more," Blakeney said finally, as he made for the door, "when I have sampled this man."

It was then nine o'clock in the evening. The night was dark and stormy. Gusts of wind alternated with sharp showers of rain—an altogether unusual state of weather for the time of year in these parts. The few passers-by of respectable appearance on their way home from business or work did no more than throw a cursory glance on the tall figure that passed hurriedly by. A few vagabonds clinging to their rags which the wind threatened to tear off their meagre bodies, did perhaps pause, cowering against a dark wall, murmuring a threat or a curse against the aristo, but an unexpected coin slipped into their grimy hands, quickly silenced both curse and threat.

Blakeney knew his way well through the streets of Orange. Having kept along the river-bank till he came to the bridge, he turned up the Rue de la République. Glancing up at a house on his right, a smile of pure joy lit up his anxious face. Three nights ago on this spot, he had carried Architect Caristie's small son in his arms, while Caristie and his wife followed him down the street to the market-cart which awaited them at the top of the bridge. Three hours later an officer of the revolutionary army was hammering at the door of Caristie's lodgings, only to find that the birds had flown. It had been a merry night, and merrier morning, while he, Blakeney, drove the market-cart out of the city with Caristie and his wife concealed amidst the sacks of haricots and peas, and the boy thrust into an empty oil-jar.

Well! something equally daring would have to be devised for the girl Fleurette, and perhaps for her father, the mysterious Armand. Blakeney, throwing back his head in the teeth of rain and wind, drew a deep breath of delight. This was life in very truth. To plan, to scheme, to accomplish. Alternately hare and hound, to revel in this chase with human lives as the goal. And if at times the thought of beautiful Marguerite, lonely and anxious in far-off England, caused a pang, like a knife-thrust to his heart, her soothing voice, her reassuring smile came to him as a swift vision from the spirit-land to encourage and console. In suffering and anxiety, as well as in the joy of reunion, Marguerite always understood.

Now he turned from the Place de la République into the Rue Longue, and the next couple of hundred yards brought him to the house of Lucien Amouret, corn-chandler. The outside door was on the latch. Pushing it open he found himself in a narrow hall, with an inner door leading into the shop on his left and a staircase in front of him. A lamp hung from the ceiling and shed a dim light on stair and hall. From the shop came the sound of voices in conversation, but though the stairs creaked under his tread, no one came out to see whose the step might be.

Sir Percy ran lightly up the stairs, and on the first landing came to the door, painted a slate grey. This part of the house appeared silent and deserted; the upper floors wrapped in dead gloom. A rusty bell-pull hung beside the door. Sir Percy gave it a pull, and a discordant clang roused the sleeping echoes of the chandler's house. A moment or two later he caught the sound of shuffling footsteps, the door was opened, an old woman in cap and shawl mutely inquired what the visitor desired.

"Is Citizen Armand within?" Blakeney asked.

The woman, he thought, looked at him rather curiously for a second or two, then shrugged her shoulders. Without wasting words she shuffled off down a dimly-lighted passage, leaving him to enter or not, as he pleased. The next moment he heard a woman's voice—the same woman probably—say: "An aristo is asking to see Citizen Armand." Again a moment's silence, then the woman came shuffling back, signed to him to enter and closed the door behind him.

"In there," she said laconically, and nodded towards the end of the passage where a half-open door revealed a shaft of more brilliant light. Then she shuffled off again, presumably to her kitchen, leaving the visitor to his own devices.

Sir Percy took off his hat and coat and laid them down on a chair close by; he then walked the length of the passage to the half-open door, pushed it open and found himself in a small room, comfortably furnished, lighted by a lamp which stood upon a centre table. The table was littered with papers. Behind it sat a man writing. At sound of Sir Percy's footsteps he looked up. The eyes of the two men met, and it almost seemed to one of them at least that time for a few seconds stood still.

And then a pleasant laugh broke the silence, and a gentle lazy voice said slowly:

"Egad! if it is not my engaging friend M. Chambertin! The gods do indeed favour me, sir, for there's no man in the world I would sooner have seen at this hour than your amiable self."

After the first paralysing second, Chauvelin had jumped to his feet. He had thought that once again his feverish fancy was playing his senses a mocking trick, that the face which ever haunted his day-dreams and his sleepless nights had only come to him on the wings of imagination. But the merry laugh, the lazy voice were all too real. His enemy was truly there, not a vision, but a cruel, mocking reality. Swiftly his claw-like hand shot out, fastened on an object that lay amidst a litter of papers, and would have lifted it, had not another slender and firm hand shot out likewise and fastened itself upon his wrist with a grasp like a vice of steel.

Chauvelin had the greatest difficulty in the world to smother a cry of pain. His fingers opened, spread out fan-wise, the pistol which he had seized fell back upon the litter of papers. With a soft laugh Sir Percy sat down on the edge of the table, picked up the pistol, withdrew the charge and swept it into the sand-box close to his hand, the while Chauvelin watched him greedily, hungrily, as a caged feline might watch a prey that was beyond its reach.

A white-faced clock on the wall struck the half-hour. Sir Percy laid the pistol down upon the table, and flicked his fine, well-shaped hands one against the other.

"There now, my dear M. Chambertin," he said gaily, "we can converse more comfortably together. Do you think it would have been wise to put a charge of powder through your humble servant? We should both of us have missed much of the zest of life."

"It is always your pleasure to mock, Sir Percy," Chauvelin said with an effort. "There are various popular sayings which I might recall to your mind, such as that the pitcher went once too often to the well."

"And Sir Percy once too often to visit his friend M. Chambertin, eh?"

"I think you will find that this is so," Chauvelin rejoined, trying, none too successfully, to ape his enemy's easy familiarity. "Orange is not a healthy place for English spies these days."

"Possibly not," Blakeney retorted lightly. "Nor for some unfortunate children of France, I am thinking."

"Traitors and spies, you are right there, Sir Percy. We have no use for them in Orange—or elsewhere."

"Or for honest men, eh, my friend? for chaste women and innocent children. That is why your humble servant and the league of which methinks you know a thing or two, propose to remove these from this polluted soil."

Chauvelin had rested his elbow on the table. His hand shading his face against the glare of the lamp, effectually concealed its varying expressions from the keen eyes of his enemy.

"You have not told me yet, Sir Percy," he said after a few seconds' silence, "what procures me the honour of your visit at this hour."

"Pure chance, my dear sir," Blakeney replied, "though the honour is entirely mine. As a matter of fact I came to find one Armand."

Twice did the pendulum of the white-faced clock tick the seconds before Chauvelin said quietly:

"My colleague? Have you business with him?"

"Yes," Blakeney replied slowly. "I have a message for him."

"I can deliver it."

"Why not I? since I came on purpose."

"My colleague is absent."

"I can wait."

"From whom then is the message?"

"From his daughter."

"Ah!"

Once more there was a pause. The white-faced clock ticked on but the two men were silent. Chauvelin's face was shaded by his hand, and it needed all the energy, all the strength of his will to keep that hand absolutely steady, not to allow a finger to tremble. In the other hand he held a long quill pen and with it he traced a geometrical pattern upon a blank sheet of paper. Sir Percy Blakeney, still sitting on the edge of the table, watched him, motionless.

"Pretty drawing that," he said abruptly. And with slender finger pointed to the design that grew in intricate lines under Chauvelin's aimless pen.

The other gave a start, the pen spluttered, scattering the ink in spots all over the paper.

"There now, you have spoilt it," Sir Percy continued lightly. "I had no idea you were such a master draughtsman."

Chauvelin threw down his pen. He had his nerves under control at last, was able to drop his hand, to lean back in his chair, and with both hands buried in the pockets of his breeches, to throw back his head and look his enemy squarely in the face.

"About that message, Sir Percy," he said with well-feigned indifference.

"What about it, my dear M. Chambertin?" Blakeney rejoined lightly.

"My colleague, Citizen Armand, has been called away—to Lyons on State business."

"But how unfortunate!" Sir Percy exclaimed.

"I am sending a courier to Lyons this very night."

"Too late, my dear M. Chambertin! Too late, I fear!"

Chauvelin frowned. "What mean you by too late, Sir Percy?" he asked slowly.

"Armand's daughter is sick, my dear M. Chambertin," Blakeney rejoined, speaking very slowly, as if to weigh his every word. "Before your courier can possibly reach Lyons, she will be dead."

"My God!——"

It was the most heart-rending cry that had ever come from a man's throat. Chauvelin had jumped to his feet; his two hands, claw-like, as if carved in marble, gripped the arms of his chair; his knees were shaking, his pale eyes stared like those of a maniac, his cheeks were the colour of lead.

For the space of ten seconds he stood thus, with his whole body quivering, his senses reeling, his eyes fixed on those finely-moulded lips that had dealt this appalling blow. Then slowly consciousness returned, a veil seemed to be lifted from before his eyes, knowledge had entered his brain. He knew that he had fallen into the trap set for him by this astute adventurer. He realized that he had betrayed the secret which he would have guarded with his life.

"So," Sir Percy said at last very slowly, "'tis you are Citizen Armand, and the sweetest flower that ever bloomed in this putrid atmosphere has its roots in polluted soil?"

Still quite slowly and deliberately he drew Fleurette's note out of the breast-pocket of his coat; for a second or two he held it lightly between slender finger and thumb, then laid it on the table in front of Chauvelin.

"She is not sick," he said quietly, "nor yet dying. If you have not forgotten how to pray, man, pray to God now, pray with all your might, that the same power which enabled you to torture my wife and wellnigh to break her brave spirit, will aid you to save your daughter from those tigers whom you have called your friends."

Chauvelin had sunk back in the chair. His head was buried in his hands. Tumultuous thoughts rushed through his brain until he felt that his reason must be tottering. A haze was before his eyes. Perhaps it was caused by tears. Who knows? Only the recording angel mayhap. Even wild beasts cry in agony when deprived of their young.

Only after a few minutes did he become aware of the note penned by his little Fleurette and laid in front of him by his bitterest foe. The Scarlet Pimpernel! The only man in all the world who might perhaps have saved Fleurette, who would have saved Fleurette, if he, Chauvelin, had not betrayed the secret of his heart.

Like one waking from a dream, Chauvelin picked up the note, and looked fearfully about him, dreading to meet those mocking lazy eyes, which, no doubt, at this hour gleamed with malicious triumph.

But Sir Blakeney was no longer there.

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SIR PERCY HITS BACK

The stage was now set for the last act of the tragedy, which the chief actor himself knew could only end one way. He had schemed and planned until he felt that his reason would give way, until he feared that he would lose the nerve and the power of which he had such sore need. He had thought of everything, weighed every possibility from the bribing of prison warders, to the suppression—by murder if need be—of the two witnesses Godet and Adèle. He had thought of turning the tables on Pochart and Danou, by launching accusations against them. But all these plans had to be rejected one by one. Fleurette liberated to-day through the success of one or the other of these schemes would only be re-arrested on the morrow. The suppression of the witnesses, the arrest of his more powerful enemies, would only rouse more bitter antagonism against himself and, failing in the end to save his Fleurette, would end in precipitating her doom.

Driven by despair, he had at one time pinned his hopes of salvation for the child on the possible interference of the Scarlet Pimpernel, but even that fond and foolish hope had been shattered by his betrayal of his jealously guarded secret. What was there left to hope for? That his power was great enough at the Tribunal to force an acquittal in spite of the witnesses, in spite of Pochart and Danou and all the mob whom they had already gathered round them. The Public Prosecutor, a man of his own making, would not dare to side against him. But there was the populace, the rabble, the swinish multitude, who, now that even the worst type of venal and corrupt jury had been abolished, were judges and jury, advocate and prosecutor all in one. The last word always rested with them, and Pochart and Danou, egged on by envy and revenge, would know how to sway the rabble.

Chauvelin was not the man to indulge in illusions. He knew well enough—none better—that the passions of hatred and of spite which he himself had engendered and fostered in the hearts of his fellow-men, were turned against him, as they had been turned on all the makers of this bloody revolution, on your Brissots and your Carriers, your Philippe d'Orléans, and your great Danton. They would destroy his exquisite Fleurette as effectually as they had destroyed thousands of others, equally innocent.

And now the end had come. No longer could the day be put off. President Legrange and Public Prosecutor Isnard might be arriving in Paris any hour when the new aerial telegraph might be set in motion, or a courier sent down to Orange post-haste and burst the bubble of Chauvelin's machinations.

And then on that afternoon of the 15th of June two things occurred. To begin with when the Public Prosecutor placed before him the printed forms of accusation with the names left in blank, and with them a list of the names of those awaiting trial, Chauvelin with a hand that appeared quite steady, wrote in one of the blank spaces the name of Fleur Chauvelin, *nommée* Armand. Secondly when, an hour later, the captain of the guard stood in the courtyard of the Caristie House reading out the names of those who were to stand their trial on the morrow, Fleurette heard the sound of her own name.

She was not frightened, nor did she weep. Tears were a thing of the past for her. Twenty days had gone by since she had been happy, more than a fortnight since she had been brought into this house and deprived of air and sunlight and joy. One by one those who had been kind to her in this prison house had gone: Claire de Châtelard, Madame de Mornas, poor Eugénie Blanc, and kind M. de Bollène. Their names had been on the Roll-call. The next day they were gone, and Fleurette never saw them again. Lately she had been lonely too. No one had taken the place in her unsophisticated heart of Claire de Châtelard. The only friend she had left was the warder's aide, the rough scavenger who had brought her the two welcome letters. Amédé's and Bibi's. He still continued his antics, joined in the gruesome mummeries which still went on in the common room, and Fleurette somehow had a sense of reassurance when he was nigh. But this night of all nights, after she had heard the captain of the guard read her name upon the Roll-call, her grimy friend was not there. Fleurette missed him, and disappointment over his absence was the only sorrowful feeling of which she felt conscious, when she realized that her fate would be decided on the morrow.

She was not afraid. Had not Bibi enjoined her, begged her to trust him and not to be afraid? She wondered when she would be allowed to see Bibi, whether he would be there to-morrow, at her trial, encouraging her with his presence and with his glance when she was made to stand before the judge. She knew that in a sense she had done wrong. She had taken Madame's valuables and handed them over to Amédé. This she had no right to do, and since Adèle had seen her with M'sieu' Amédé that evening, and spoken ill of her because of that, she supposed that she would be punished. It was only vaguely that she marvelled what the punishment would be. But she was not afraid because she trusted Bibi. Nor did she regret her actions. If it had all to be done over again, she would act in precisely the same way. The mysterious voice often rang in her ear even now. She had obeyed the commands of *le bon Dieu*, and it was *le bon Dieu* who had chosen a still more mysterious way for saving M'sieu' Amédé from the consequences of her actions.

Thus did Fleurette envisage the day that was to come, with love and trust in her heart for Bibi, and the certainty after all these trials and tribulations of a happy reunion with him and old Louise at Lou Mas.

Not to mention the reunion with M'sieu' Amédé.

The first thing that struck Fleurette's perceptions when she entered that huge room, was that up at the further end of it—upon a raised platform and behind a tall desk, sat Bibi chéri himself. Two other men sat there with him, but Fleurette hardly saw them. It was on Bibi that she looked. She had slept very little during the night. Excitement had kept her awake, as well as the tears and lamentations of two of her room-mates who were to appear with her this day before the Tribunal.

And it was Bibi who was to be her judge. Well then obviously she had nothing to fear. One of some fifteen of her fellow-prisoners, she was bustled with them across the room to a wooden bench where they were roughly ordered to sit down. As they crossed the room boos and hisses, and one or two louder cries of execration, greeted them. A few remarks, all of them malevolent, rose above the murmurs.

"That old man there, I knew him once. Old tyrant. He's getting his deserts at last."

"Do you see the woman next to him? Five free-born Frenchwomen she had at a time once, to wait on her and do her hair. Aristo, va! It won't take long to do thy hair to-morrow. One snick with the scissors, what?"

"That young wench too. Not much more than eighteen, I warrant."

"I hear she is a thief as well as a traitor."

"Pity they should have abolished the whipping-post. That would have done the young traitors a world of good."

"Me, I prefer the guillotine; quickest work, eh?"

Fleurette had blushed with shame to the roots of her hair. She tried not to look in the direction whence these voices, harsh and coarse, had come. She tried to think of all the prayers which M. le Curé had taught her long ago. She tried to think of M'sieu' Amédé and of the joy she would have when she saw him again. But she could not shut the gates of her consciousness against all these people who had gathered here for the sole purpose of seeing their fellow-creatures suffer. Men and women and even little children. The women for the most part had brought their knitting, for every one was knitting socks these days for the brave soldiers who were fighting against the enemies of France, and through the murmur of voices, the monotonous click-click of the needles acted as an irritant upon the nerves.

All around there appeared to be a sea of faces. And eyes. Innumerable eyes that glared, and mouths that grinned and derided. And above the faces, a sea of red caps with tricolour cockades. Fleurette tried hard not to look. She closed her eyes and tried to murmur the prayers she and M'sieu' Amédé used to say together when M. le Curé prepared them for their first communion.

Bibi wore a hat with feathers. He had a bell in front of him, and this he often tinkled, when the noise from the crowd all around became too great. Once or twice he was addressed as "Citizen President." Fleurette had never seen him look so stern. The words which he spoke to the accused were not only bitter but terribly cruel. He seemed so unlike her real chéri Bibi, that she caught herself marvelling whether her fancy was not playing her aching eyes some strange and horrible trick.

One after the other the names of her fellow-prisoners were called, and one by one they were made to stand up and then walk to the centre of the room and up a couple of shallow steps to a small raised platform round which there was a wooden railing. In every instance as soon as the prisoner mounted this platform, and became as it were the centre of attraction for all these innumerable eyes, he or she would be greeted with groans and hisses and cat's calls, until Bibi tinkled his bell and loudly demanded silence.

A man in a red cap who sat just below Bibi's desk then stood up and read something out aloud, which Fleurette never understood, but which the crowd apparently did, for the reader was frequently interrupted by more boos and hisses and often cries of execration. After this reading Bibi, or one of the two men who sat beside him, asked the prisoner questions. These were sometimes replied to, but not always. The crowd invariably threw in loud comments on both questions and answers, and Bibi was then forced to tinkle his bell in order to demand silence. And through the noise, the cries and the hisses, the questions and answers, the one sound that was never drowned, and never was still, was the click-click of hundreds of knitting-needles.

The first batch of prisoners to face the Tribunal, were men and women almost unknown to Fleurette. They had not long been brought into the Caristie House, had replaced others who had been Fleurette's early companions in prison. She had seen them in the common room, acting in the grim farces that were the fashion there, but she had not made friends with them as she had done with Claire de Châtelard or Madame de Mornas. But when came the turn of a woman who had actually been her room-mate, who had sat next to her on the bench of the accused, and squeezed her hand ere she was led up to the raised platform with the wooden railing, then, Fleurette felt all her resolution of bravery and trust in Bibi giving way.

The heat in the room had become unbearable. The stench of dank and grimy clothes, of perspiring humanity, of hot breaths charged with hate, acted as a pungent soporific. Fleurette's head fell forward once or twice, her eyes involuntarily closed. For a time she lost consciousness. It was her own name spoken in a stentorian voice that brought her back to reality.

"Fleur Chauvelin, nommée Armand."

Some one nudged her elbow. An impatient voice rasped out a sharp: "Allons! allons!" and she found herself dragged to her feet and led by the arm to the raised platform, amidst a din which fortunately was too great to allow her ears to catch individual sounds.

She looked straight across to Bibi, who was as pale as a waxen image.

"Fleur Chauvelin, nommée Armand."

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SIR PERCY HITS BACK

There is no doubt that everything would have gone well, had it not been for Fleurette herself. Perhaps "well" is the wrong word: "differently" would be better. Nothing could have gone "well," because even though Chauvelin had succeeded in obtaining an acquittal, his enemies would have returned immediately to the charge, and forced on the girl's re-arrest even before she had left the Tribunal. There had been cases during the past few weeks, in Paris, in Lyons and so on, when prisoners were acquitted and re-arrested, re-tried, acquitted again, and again re-arrested. A regular cat-and-mouse game, at which Chauvelin himself was an adept. Nevertheless with a first acquittal there might have been some hope. And he practically had obtained that acquittal, when Fleurette herself ruined her chance, and caused her own condemnation. Chauvelin could have struck her for her folly. His love for her always pertained to that of a wild beast for its young; the instinct to devour in moments of peril. If she was destined to perish, then it should be by his own hand, not as a spectacle for the rabble to gloat on.

The *Moniteur* of the 22nd Messidor gives one or two interesting details concerning the trial of a country girl named Fleur Chauvelin, daughter of a Citizen Armand Chauvelin of the Central Committee of Public Safety, and member of the National Convention, and relates at full length the extraordinary incidents which marked its close. Looking back upon that memorable day, and on the solemn hour which saw the girl Fleur Chauvelin *nommée* Armand called to the bar of the accused, we visualize Chauvelin, the father, presiding over that Tribunal of infamy, and having sent within the last half-hour half a dozen fellow-creatures callously to death, now seeing his own daughter, the only being in all the world whom he had ever loved, standing there before him, accused, condemned already in the eyes of the *canaille.*

There was no time wasted during the proceedings, wherein the accused was allowed neither jury nor advocate. The State as represented by its three nominees who sat as judges, was judge and jury and prosecutor all in one. It was men like Chauvelin who had invented this travesty of justice and eliminated all procedure devised by civilization for the protection of the accused.

The Public Prosecutor opened the proceedings by reading the indictment in mechanical monotone; it was identically the same as that framed against hundreds of others—guilty or innocent alike—the printed formula invented by the odious Foucquier-Tinville in which the words "Traitor," and "Enemy of the Republic" were alone intelligible. All else was a jumble of words. The crowd was not listening. Their attention was fixed on the accused whose modest bearing and spotless attire seemed to arouse their spite and their derision, more than the rags and filth displayed by a previous prisoner had done.

When the reading of the indictment came to an end, Pochart sitting beside the Presiding Judge asked the usual question:

"Is the prisoner accused publicly or in secret?"

And the Public Prosecutor replied: "Publicly."

Danou, the third judge then asked: "By whom?"

And again the Public Prosecutor gave reply:

"By one Adèle," he said, "of unknown parentage, and by Citizen Lieutenant Godet of the revolutionary army."

"And to what will these persons testify?"

"To the treason committed against the State by the accused and to her connection with the enemies of the Republic."

After which Adèle was called. Her small rat-like face looked wan and pinched; her hands trembled visibly, and she wiped them continually against the ragged apron which she wore. She was obviously very nervous and never looked once in the direction of the accused, but she spoke clearly enough in a shrill, high-pitched voice. Questioned at first by the Public Prosecutor, she presently embarked more glibly upon her story, relating the events which were intended to condemn Fleurette. Chauvelin already knew the tale by heart. The soldiers on the bridge. The raid on the château. Fleurette's halt that evening in the cottage of the widow Tronchet. Her assignation, through Adèle, with Amédé Colombe. The casket and wallet underneath her shawl, then transferred into young Colombe's keeping.

Ofttimes Chauvelin tried to break into the girl's narrative; he put stern questions to her, tried to intimidate her, to trip her into misstatements of obvious contradictions. But Adèle held her ground. Informer, ingrate, wanton though she was, she was speaking the truth and was not to be shaken. Hisses and boos from the crowd oft greeted the President's cross-questionings, cries of approbation greeted Adèle's spirited rejoinders. In the wordy warfare between herself and Chauvelin, she scored nearly every time. Encouraged by the sympathy of the rabble, she lost her nervousness, whilst he gradually lost his self-control. He had so much at stake, and she nothing but the satisfaction of vanity and of spite.

"Be not intimidated, citizeness," Pochart put in forcefully at one moment, "let not powerful influences sway you from your duty."

"Vas-y Adèle of unknown parentage!" one of the women shouted from above. "'Twas some aristo doubtless who betrayed thy mother. Let this aristo at least pay for her kind."

Amidst thunderous applause Adèle stepped down from the bar. Chauvelin tried in vain to command silence, he was shouted down by the crowd.

"Thou'rt a true patriot, Citizen Chauvelin" one woman called out lustily. "To have a traitor for a daughter is a curse. Her death will not be for thee a sacrifice."

He waited in seeming patience, white to the lips, until the tumult had subsided, then calling all his reserves of strength, moral and mental, to his aid, he said in a calm firm voice:

"The witness has lied. The events which she has described could not have taken place in her presence seeing that on that day and at that hour she was in my house, at Lou Mas, half a league away."

This pronouncement was greeted with mighty uproar. Derisive laughter, cat's calls, whistling, strident shouts made riotous confusion. Only two persons in the crowded room appeared serene. One was the accused, the other her judge. The *Moniteur* says that throughout the whole proceedings the attitude of the accused was astonishingly calm: "d'une sérénité étonnante." She looked straight before her, sometimes at the President, but more often her eyes appeared to be fixed on the tricolour flag draped over the wall above his head, and ornamented with a red cap and the words writ largely: "Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité ou la Mort."

And so too was the President equally serene. Outwardly. He stood upright whilst the turmoil continued, with head erect and hands held behind his back. Insults and jeers flew at him from every side. But he never winced. The rabble called him, "Traitor, Liar, Tyrant!" and various other names impossible to record. But he waited in seeming patience until the crowd, eager to hear more, fell to comparative stillness once more. Then Pochart's rasping voice cut through the silence, like the sound of a file against metal.

"You'll have to substantiate that statement, Citizen President," he said.

"My statements need no substantiation," Chauvelin retorted coolly. "The word of a representative of the people is sufficient against any witness."

And while Pochart was considering a suitable repartee, Danou put in smoothly.

"Should we not hear the next witness, Citizen Lieutenant Godet, before we discuss the matter?"

"Yes, yes!" the crowd yelled in response.

Scenting the unusual, the crowd was more excited than was its wont. Of late these hasty trials, six to the hour, with condemnation as a foregone conclusion, had become monotonous. One condemnation had been very much like another. But here was something novel. The rumour had already spread like wildfire that the accused was no less than the daughter of the President, Citizen Chauvelin, who was well known in the councils of State, a prominent member of many committees, and, some said, a personal friend of the great Robespierre. Here in truth was a test of supreme patriotism; a judge called upon to condemn his own daughter if she be guilty. And of course she was guilty, or she would not be here. There was no sympathy for either of them, only interest in the issue of this amazing trial. The crowd did not like the prisoner's attitude, what they called her aristocratic airs and disdainful ways; even the children pointed grimy little fingers at her and hurled the poisonous darts of loathsome epithets at the aristo.

Thus was the scene prepared for the entrance of Lieutenant Godet, who stepped up to the witness' platform with a display of self-assurance and a swagger that charmed the women. He was a man after their own heart, a real sansculotte in grimy rags, unkempt, unshaved, unwashed, the type of which the martyr Jean Paul Marat had been the most perfect exponent.

Conversations, objurgations, murmurs even were stilled; the click-click of knitting-needles alone made a soft accompaniment to Citizen Godet's replies to the Public Prosecutor's preliminary questions. It was indeed a remarkable, an amazing, an almost unbelievable tale, which he had to tell. And gradually as he unfolded the various details of this extraordinary adventure a hush fell over the crowded room, very like the calm which Nature assumes ere she sends forth the thunders of her wrath.

Godet, still with this air of self-assurance, related how he and the soldiers under his command, as well as the whole commune of Laragne had been tricked by a band of English spies whose actions proved them to have been in league with Amédé Colombe and with the accused. He told of the magnificently dressed soldiers. Their raid on the premises of Colombe the grocer of the Rue Haute. Their march through the village. Their captain's swagger. His orders to himself, Godet, and to the real soldiers of the revolutionary army.

Still the crowd gave no sign of approbation, or disapprobation. Only that ominous, expectant hush which presaged a storm. The accused, always serene, smiled—so the *Moniteur* avers—as she encountered the President's glance. Smiled cheerfully and trustfully. But the President's face was inscrutable, and the colour of wax.

And then Godet went on to relate the long, weary tramp along the mountain roads. The dust. The fatigue. The want of food. He told how ci-devant

Frontenac and Amédé Colombe, wrested from the hands of justice, were presently taken to some unknown place of safety, while the soldiers of the Republic were left by the wayside, to perish of fatigue or inanition.

He had finished speaking, and still the click-click of the knitting-needles was the only sound that broke the silence. The witness, sensing this silence, feeling its menace, had lost something of his arrogance; the hand with which he stroked his shaggy moustache trembled perceptibly. The accused, overcome by the heat, wiped her forehead with the corner of her apron, then she smiled once more across at her father.

And suddenly through the solemn stillness a woman's shrill voice was raised.

"Those English spies did make a fool of thee, I am thinking, Citizen Godet!"

This suddenly relieved the tension. It was like a dam let loose. In a moment every kind of call and of cry, of laughter and of groan rang from end to end of the room.

"The English have made a fool of thee!"

Within a minute or two this became a general cry, accompanied by the stamping of feet, and loud and prolonged laughter, both malevolent and derisive. Godet, ludicrous in his bewilderment, rolled terror-filled eyes, whilst vainly trying to raise his voice above the din. The *Moniteur* says definitely that the accused put her hands to her ears. The uproar was in truth deafening.

A few moments of this confusion, and the next, Chauvelin was on his feet clanging his bell. His stentorian voice rose above the tumult, demanded silence, and in the lull that presently ensued, that same voice, now subdued to a lower, though no less impressive key, rang clear and calm.

"Is it not an insult, citizen patriots, to ask you to listen to the words of a fool, when the life of a French girl is at stake?"

The passionate earnestness with which he spoke, the burning indignation expressed in that calm, subdued voice, had the effect of awing the screaming rabble. They turned to gaze on him, as he stood there, facing them all, calm, proud, almost majestic, despite his small stature. Seizing this sudden advantage he began to speak. Without a gesture, hardly raising his voice, he began quietly, not choosing his words, or striving after eloquence, but only as a man speaking to his friends. And by one of those inexplicable reactions which will so often change the temper of a crowd, men, women and children ceased to curse and to deride. The innumerable eyes were fixed with more curiosity than malevolence upon him, the mouths, agape, uttered no further groan, and once more the click-click of knitting-needles was momentarily stilled.

"Citizens," he said, "you have heard two witnesses against the accused. One of these, the wench Adèle, I myself, representative of the people, have convicted of deliberate falsehood, spoken to the prejudice of a French patriot. The other your own words have condemned for a fool, and an easy tool in the hands of English spies. You called him a fool, citizens, but I call him a traitor. Lieutenant Godet was not a tool in the hands of the English spies, he was their confederate, their help. Can you bring yourselves to believe, citizens, that a loyal soldier of the Republic could be deceived by false uniforms, by French words spoken by alien lips? Can you believe this story of a forced march, of starvation by the wayside in the company of English spies whose every action, every word, every gesture almost, must have betrayed them as the foreigners they actually were. Citizens, I appeal to that reputation for clear thinking and for logic, for which French men and women are famous throughout the world. At this hour, when our beloved country is threatened on every side, is this the time, I say, for allowing yourselves to be duped by traitors who would sell you and your land, your dues and your liberty for English gold ——?"

"No! no!" came a lusty shout in response. And the crowd took up the cry. "No! We'll not sell our liberties for English gold."

"Say on, Citizen Representative."

Pochart had jumped to his feet; once or twice he had tried to break in on Chauvelin's peroration, with cries of: "Thou'rt slandering a soldier of the Republic!" or: "Traitor! thou'rt in league with thy daughter!"

But he was not listened to. There was something about Chauvelin which fascinated the mob. His white, calm face, his pale, piercing eyes, his voice, dull, even monotonous, but penetrating to the most distant corners of the room. And there was also that welcome element of novelty. This pleased the women. Trials and condemnations in incessant routine had begun to pall. Here was something new. Witnesses summoned, then discredited, and finally accused. Such a thing had never been witnessed before in Orange.

And so the crowd would not listen to Pochart or Danou, they wanted to hear Chauvelin; they did not particularly wish to see Fleurette *nommée* Armand acquitted, but they did relish the prospect of the two witnesses being sent to the bench of the accused That was novelty for them, and it was what they wanted for the moment. Moreover they did think that the citizen lieutenant with all his swagger had been such a consummate fool, if no worse, that it would be distinctly amusing to see that stupid head of his roll down into the basket of the guillotine.

Neither Pochart nor Danou, however, were men to give up the struggle quite so easily. In the fight against the representative on special mission, who had threatened them and lorded it over them for so long, they only contemplated one issue: victory. Victory! which would mean satisfaction of pride and of revenge. They had set out to win and did not consider themselves beaten. Not yet. Already Pochart was on his feet, and his rasping voice rose booming above the tumult. As soon as a slight lull gave him an opportunity he seized it, and cried in thunderous accents:

"Citizens! Frenchmen! French women! All of you!" And then again: "Citizens all! Let me put the same question to you, that the President asked you just now: will you allow yourselves to be duped? Will you go like sheep whithersoever traitors may lead you?"

The crowd murmured and shrugged shoulders, would have shouted Pochart down only that that rasping voice of his rose above the cry of: "À la lanterne, all traitors and fools!"

Pointing an accusing finger at Chauvelin, Pochart took up the cry.

"So say I," he roared in a terrific straining of his powerful lungs: "À la lanterne all the traitors who try to throw dust in your eyes. Have you forgotten that the Citizen President is the father of the accused? And that he knows well enough that if the child be guilty, then is the parent guilty too? To save himself he is trying to shield a traitor. Do not allow yourselves to be duped by him. Look on the Citizen President, my friends, and ask him how it comes about that he lavished all the treasures of his eloquence upon this one traitor, when yesterday, and the day before that, he sent to the guillotine every man, woman and child who came before the Tribunal, and on a mere suspicion of treason."

A dull murmur greeted this peroration. There had been something in Pochart's eloquence which caused the crowd not to veer round just yet, but at any rate to look on the President of the Tribunal with rather less awe, and something approaching suspicion.

"That is true," a woman said loudly. "The President showed no mercy to traitors yesterday. And it is treason now to be as much as suspected of treason, we've been told."

"It is my duty to protect the innocent," Chauvelin retorted firmly, "as well as to punish the guilty."

"Methinks," Danou now broke in, and his slow and suave tones came in strange contrast to the clamorous eloquence of his colleagues: "methinks that the traitor Danton made some such remark too, ere justice put her hand on him."

"Danton was a traitor, and thou too, Citizen Danou, art a traitor for speaking his name in this hall of justice."

"Justice!" Pochart cried, pallid with rage, for he had felt that the word "traitor" hurled at Danou was meant to strike him also. "Justice! hark at the traitor, who should be standing in the dock beside his brood."

"Vas-y, Citizen President," the women cried excitedly. "It is thy turn now."

They had cast aside their knitting, so palpitating had this duel become between these three men. Insensate, doltish as they were, they scented the tragedy that underlay this wordy warfare; they guessed that the man who presided over this infamous tribunal and who with a casual stroke of the pen had sent hundreds indiscriminately to death, had one soft corner in his callous heart, and that his colleagues, consumed with envy and hatred, were hitting at that vulnerable spot and had already succeeded in making him writhe in agony.

At the same time, such is the psychology of a multitude as against that of individuals, there was still a wave of sympathy tending in the direction of this father fighting so desperately for the life of his child. Strictly speaking, it was not sympathy, rather was it mere instinctive understanding of family ties. Five years of this awful revolution, during which every cruel lust in man or woman had been sedulously fostered, every softer mood repressed, had not yet succeeded in crushing altogether that feeling for family solidarity which is the most distinctive characteristic of the French nation. And this spectacle of a father sitting in judgment over his own child, and actually expected to pronounce the death-sentence over her, did undoubtedly for the time being sway the crowd in his favour. He was given a more respectful hearing than either of his colleagues or either of the witnesses, and when Godet's name recurred on the tapis, it was greeted with derisive cries of "Cet imbécile!" and when Adèle was mentioned, most of the women shouted spitefully: "Liar!"

Chauvelin, sensitive of course to the slightest wavering in the temper of the populace, felt his advantage and strained every nerve to press it home. The whole situation was of course terribly precarious. At any moment a look, a word, a false move on his part, might cause the crowd to veer right over against him. Even after an acquittal sometimes, the populace would suddenly demand that the accused be re-arrested: a second trial, more of a mockery and a travesty of justice than the first, would be insisted on, after which condemnation was a foregone conclusion. All this Chauvelin knew, none better, and there were moments when he felt as if madness or death were preferable to this terrible fight that in the end could have but one issue. And yet fight he must, fight for every inch of ground, fight with the last breath in his body, and with it silence the vituperations of those fiends who had raised their noisome voices against his Fleurette.

Even now Pochart was on his feet again, shouting, gesticulating, banging his fist upon the table.

"Citizens," he reiterated for the third time, "do not let yourselves be duped by men who are ruining your country by pandering to traitors. Look at the accused! I say she is nothing but a wanton, who should be tied to the whipping-post ere she be sent to the guillotine. Look at the aristocrat, I say, with the demure airs and the folded kerchief; she, forsooth, goes forth o' nights to meet her lover under the almond-trees, there to concoct treason with her lover against the Republic. She was seen, remember, seen, I say, in spite of what interested parties may aver. You have heard the witness, a humble, simple girl, the victim of aristocratic lust and of tyranny. That witness spoke the truth. She saw the accused and her lover at dead of night whispering and embracing. I ask you, does a clean-minded, respectable woman, citizen of our glorious Republic, spend her nights in the company of her lover? Rather is it not the wanton, the traitor, who shuns the light of day and seeks the darkness, for the hatching of treasonable plots against the State? Look at the witness, citizens. Humbly and simply did she speak the truth——"

"She lied as well you know it, Citizen Pochart," Chauvelin broke in forcefully. "Liar, forger and thief, I decree her accused and command that she stand her trial for these offences against the Republic. Look at her, my friends, citizens all," he went on, and pointed an accusing finger at Adèle whose pinched little face had become the colour of lead, and who sat in a corner of the witness' bench, cowering within herself, her trembling hands, now and then, lifting a handkerchief to wipe the sweat of terror that had risen to her brow. "Look at her," Chauvelin continued, appealing to the sea of faces before him: "And now look at the accused. She is serene, because she is innocent, whilst the guilty trembles because she knows her treachery has come to light at last. Look at those two women, citizens, and yourselves pronounce which is the traitor and which is the stainless."

Of a truth all would have been well after that. Chauvelin passed a quivering hand across his brow. It was streaming with moisture. The strain had been immense. Mentally he felt broken by the effort. But he also felt that for the moment at least he had won the day. The *Moniteur* states definitely that: "ily eût tout lieu de croire qu'un acquittement eût été applaudi." At any rate the applause at the moment was deafening, and if Chauvelin could have obtained a hearing for another sixty seconds he would have put the acquittal to the populace vote, and, as the *Moniteur* says, it would have been carried.

What would have happened afterwards nobody can say. The most fickle entity in the world is a multitude, and of all the multitudes, an audience watching the suffering of a fellow-creature is the most fickle and the most callous. For the next two or three minutes, at any rate, Chauvelin held the sympathy of the crowd. Fleurette did not count either way. For the spectators of this heartrending pageant she was just a thing, an insentient object placed there for their entertainment, the pivot round which circled their excitement. But Chauvelin, the father pleading for his daughter's life, had won their sympathy—the sympathy of tiger-cats, satiated for the moment and licking their chops in the intervals of snarling.

All then would have been well but for the action of one of the sympathizers who stood leaning up against the wall in the crowd; a giant he was, coated with grime—coal-heaver or scavenger probably, only half clad in ragged shirt and torn breeches, with dirty feet thrust stockingless into sabots, a red worsted cap over his unkempt hair, his face streaked with sweat and coal-dust. In one hand he held a large raw carrot which he was munching with loud snapping of the jaws and smacking of the lips. He was one of the noisiest in his approval of the President's peroration.

"Vas-y, Président," he shouted. "À la lanterne, the fools and traitors. Where is that trollop?

Let her stand up. We want to look at her, eh, citizens?"

"Yes! Yes! we want to see her! Stand up, Adèle of unknown parentage! Let's look at you."

The women, of course, were the loudest in their demand for the unfortunate Adèle. Bred by misery, often out of degradation, trained by five years of an execrable revolution, the women of France were not *féministes* these days. The spectacle of one of their own sex on the guillotine gave them more satisfaction than that of a man. Now they wanted to see Adèle of the pinched, rat-like face, Adèle with the trembling hands and the shrinking shoulders, they wanted to see her squirm before their wrath, they wanted to see her wriggle like a worm prodded with a pin. Incidentally they had almost forgotten Fleurette.

Louder and even louder they clamoured for Adèle, and at an order from the President two soldiers of the National Guard did presently drag Adèle from the corner of the witness' bench where she was cowering like a frightened rodent, and dragged her—or rather carried her—to the bar of the accused. The crowd, seeing that its dictates were being obeyed, restrained its frenzy for an instant, and, through the comparative stillness that ensued, a piercing shriek rang out from the unfortunate Adèle.

"Mercy! Mercy!" she cried and struggled fiercely to free herself from the men's grasp. "I am innocent! I spoke the truth."

A thunderous shout of derisive laughter greeted her cry. The women, with their hands on their knees, were literally rocking with laughter. They thought that Adèle with a face like a rat, wisps of lank hair poking out from underneath her cap which sat all awry, with mouth wide open uttering shrieks which no one could hear through the deafening tumult, was supremely funny.

The President made no attempt to quell the disturbance. It was all to the good. The greater the hatred against Adèle, the greater his chance, not only of forcing an acquittal now for Fleurette, but also of keeping the wave of sympathy for himself at full-tide, until he had the opportunity of getting Fleurette out of Orange. He was striving with all his might to catch his darling's eye. But Fleurette's glance was fixed on Adèle. She seemed to him to be fascinated with horror, mute and paralysed. She was looking on Adèle, and her dear little hand was fidgeting the corner of her kerchief.

Through the ear-splitting uproar led by the women, Pochart and Danou, their sympathizers, men of their own choosing, vainly tried to get a hearing. As well try to shout down a tempestuous sea as these hundreds of women gloating over the spectacle of one of their own sex writhing in an agony of terror.

"Hein!" came in a stentorian shout from the grimy giant in the rear of the crowd; "thou wouldst slander the innocent girl with lies. Take that for thy pains."

And he hurled the remnant of his raw carrot over the head of the intervening crowd at the unfortunate Adèle. It missed her by a hairbreadth, but the action delighted the crowd. They took up the cry: "Take that for thy pains!" and sent various missiles flying at the girl, who, crouching down on her knees, lay there like a bundle of goods just below the bar of the accused where Fleurette stood, gazing down at her, fascinated with horror.

Looking back later on that terrible moment, Chauvelin felt that it was the action of the grimy coal-heaver—or scavenger, whatever he was—that precipitated the catastrophe. He it was who egged on the rabble to virulent hatred against Adèle. It was he who by hurling that first missile at the girl brought in a further, more immense element of cruelty and horror into the situation. Certain it is that up to that moment Fleurette had appeared more dazed than horrified. She must even in her own gentle heart have felt a burning indignation against Adèle for the treacherous part which she had played, and if the girl's arrest had been effected outside the Tribunal, she would perhaps never have actually realized what had brought it about. But with that shout of "Thou wouldst slander the innocent girl with thy lies," full consciousness returned to her, and with it the recollection of everything that had gone before. Chauvelin, who watched her with the devouring gaze of his love, saw as in a flash, through the quick glance which swept from Adèle to himself and thence over the sea of perspiring faces, the full workings of her mind.

He tried to keep the tumult going; he hoped that Fleurette would faint, so that she might be carried out of court. He prayed that the roof of the gigantic building would come crashing down and bury him and Fleurette and all that swinish multitude in its ruins ere she spoke the words which he saw hovering on her lips.

But none of these things happened. Rather by that perversity which is peculiar to Chance, a sudden lull broke in on the mighty uproar, a lull through which Fleurette's calm voice rang clear as water poured into a crystal glass.

"Adèle was not lying, nor did she slander me, I did give some valuable articles into the keeping of my beloved M'sieu' Amédé Colombe, at the hour spoken of by her, and I have no doubt that she did see me, as she says."

36

SIR PERCY HITS BACK

One must of necessity turn once more to the *Moniteur* of the 22nd Messidor year II of the Republic One and Indivisible. There in the *Choix des Rapports XXV*. 516–17, despite its sobriety of language and paucity of detail, there is ample proof that throughout the proceedings it was the action of one unknown that precipitated the final catastrophe. "Un géant," we are told, "fût le premier à lancer l'accusation fausse contre le Président du Tribunal, et un tumulte irrépressible s'ensuivit."

"False," you observe. But on that 16th day of June, 1794, Chauvelin of the National Convention, member of commitees and confidant of Robespierre, did, we know, stand in danger of being dragged out into the open and hung on the nearest lamp-post. The crowd was in no mood even to wait for the paraphernalia of the guillotine. They wanted to see the arch-traitor, the perjurer, who had sworn false oaths and lied in order to save himself and his brood, hang then and there. The giant spoken of in the *Choix des Rapports* had, it seems, hardly waited till the words were out of Fleurette's mouth, before he pushed his way to the forefront of the crowd, with vigorous play of his powerful elbows. Down, he was now, in the body of the court. In the struggle, his ragged shirt had been half torn off his shoulders, and his broad chest and sinewy arms could be seen, nude and immense, and coated with grime. Out of one of the pockets of his tattered breeches he had produced another uncooked carrot, and into this he bit lustily, then with a wide sweep of the arm he launched one by one against the President of the Tribunal the damning invectives which the *Moniteur* has characterized as false. "Traitor!" he cried. "Liar and perjurer! Citizens all, have you in all your lives ever witnessed such infamy?"

The *Choix des Rapports* describes the tumult as irrepressible. Indeed at that moment it would have been easier to dam a raging torrent with one pair of hands, than to suppress the riotous confusion that ensued. Fleurette of a truth stood there forgotten, so did Adèle and Godet. All eyes were fixed on the President, every menacing gesture tended in his direction, all the strident cries, the insults, the varied and foul epithets were hurled against him. There were but few sober tempers in that crowded room at the moment. A dozen perhaps: no more. Older men, one or two women who watched rather than yelled. And what they saw interested and puzzled them, so much that, when the time came, when everybody else was shouting themselves hoarse to the verge of mania, they still kept cool and silent.

Like everybody else these few were gazing on the President. They saw him standing there on the bench like a figure carved in stone, and, like a stone, his face was of a grey, ashen colour. His eyes looked dim and colourless as if a hand had drawn a film over them; his lips were parted, his nostrils distended. The breath seemed to come with difficulty out of his lungs. A figure, in truth, of terror and despair. But calm and still. Motionless as a stone. The giant munching his carrot had waved his huge arms about and yelled himself hoarse until he had lashed all the spectators into a state of frenzy. Finally he strode across the room, and came to a halt close to the judges' bench facing the President.

The three judges had been watching him all along: Pochart and Danou with undisguised glee, and President Chauvelin with that stony stare out of his colourless eyes. But even as the giant approached, Chauvelin, though apparently motionless, seemed inwardly to sink within himself, to crouch as a hunted beast in face of the menacing enemy. And suddenly, like that of an automaton, up went his arm. With finger outstretched he pointed at the giant and one word escaped his trembling, rigid lips.

"You!"

Those who were watching him could not understand the word, for it was spoken in an alien tongue. Nor could they understand what happened afterwards. But what actually did happen was that the grimy giant threw back his head and gave a quaint and altogether pleasant laugh.

"Why, yes!" he said in the same alien tongue, which no one present understood. "At your service, my dear M. Chambertin."

And Chauvelin murmured almost under his breath:

"You have your revenge at last, Sir Percy."

"Hitting back as you see, my friend."

It all passed unperceived in the midst of the irrepressible tumult, save by those few who sober-tempered chose to watch rather than to yell. It is doubtful whether even Pochart and Danou, who sat close by, saw anything of this brief, this mysterious scene.

The very next moment the grimy giant, this time with a hoarse and not at all pleasant laugh, had hurled his half-munched carrot straight into the President's face. Then facing the crowd once more he threw up his great arms high above his head.

"Why should we wait, citizens," he shouted louder than the rest of the yelling crowd. "À la lanterne, I say, the traitor and his brood. The guillotine is ready outside the Place. The executioner is to hand. Why wait?"

Nothing could have pleased the crowd better. They were all like tigers scenting blood, demanding it, licking their jaws in anticipation.

"Who is for a front place for the spectacle?" a man shouted from the rear of the crowd.

"À moi! the front place," a woman cried in response.

"À moi! À moi!" came from every side.

Then the general scramble began. A stampede down the gradients. The clatter of wooden sabots against the floor. The screams of women and children pushed and squeezed by the crowd. The grounding of arms, the click of bayonets, the words of command from the officer in charge of the guard, who were there to maintain order and who were quite powerless. They did of a truth try to stem the mob, to prevent the mad rush, the trampling, the stampede. But there were in reality too few of them for the task. All available fighting men being required for the army abroad, these were for the most part too inexperienced and too incompetent; raw recruits, half trained for a wholly inadequate corps of *gendarmerie*. The officers did what they could, but the men themselves were soon caught in the vortex. Having no idea of discipline or duty, they soon became just a part of the mob, allowed themselves to be carried along by the crowd. They were just as excited, just as eager to see the President of a revolutionary tribunal sent summarily to the guillotine, as anyone else.

Their lust for the spectacle was as keen as that of any ragamuffin in the place. They were but half-trained ragamuffins themselves, and as every man these days was at least as good as his officer and owed him neither obedience nor respect, it was small wonder that in emergencies like these the soldiers got out of hand, whilst the officers, shrugging their shoulders, viewed the scene with indifference.

In the meanwhile the grimy giant had effectually fought his way along the floor of the house as far as the bar of the accused, where Fleurette, wide-eyed, deathly pale, half crazy now with terror, had just fallen forward unconscious across the railing, drooping like a lily that is battered by the storm.

"And à moi the traitors," the giant shouted, and it was marvellous how his booming voice rang above the uproar and the confusion.

He dragged Fleurette's inanimate body from the bar and flung it over his shoulder, as if it were a bundle of goods. Then with two huge strides he was right in front of the judges' bench, and there turned back to face the crowd again.

"Take your places for the spectacle, citizens," he cried. "I'll bring the actors along."

He looked almost unreal as he stood there, dominating the crowd, grimy, unkempt, immense, with blackened face and huge bare chest, and the inanimate body of the girl across his massive shoulders. He seemed a being from another world, a Titan, a monster, a fiend-like fury, the embodiment of all the hates and the furies that animated the rest of the crowd. They glanced at him and trembled; some of them, who had not wholly forgotten their age and innocence, surreptitiously crossed themselves.

"Take your places for the spectacle, citizens," he went on lustily. "One actor I have ready for you. Who will bring the other?"

Three men in the forefront of the crowd were at that moment standing quite close to the judges' bench, where the President lay back in his chair, dead to everything about him, alive only through the intensity of his agony. In response to the Titan's suggestion, which was greeted with loud applause by the crowd, the three men scrambled over the desk, seized the inert person of the President between them. One of them flung a sack over his head. Thus adorned they hoisted him upon their shoulders while the crowd stamped and shouted with glee.

"Un tumulte irrépressible s'ensuivit" says the *Choix des Rapports* in the *Moniteur* of the 22nd Messidor. Tumult is but a poor word to express the actions of that multitude. Men and women and children had become blind, insentient with lust, mad with hatred and excitement.

"Take your places for the spectacle," the Titan shouted, "and I'll bring along the actors for you."

And so they rushed out in a compact, struggling mass, hurrying, scurrying, fighting and pushing and struggling. Out in the open, in the Place de la République, into the sunshine and under the blue vault of Heaven they rushed. The guillotine was set up there ready for its afternoon work, but, as the grimy giant had said, "Why wait?" Why indeed! No one was in a mood for waiting. The blackest traitor this town had ever seen had tried to save himself and his brood by slandering worthy citizens of the République. By the by, where were they? Adèle of unknown parentage and the swaggering Lieutenant Godet? Ah bah! they were forgotten. Lost in the crowd. Who cared? Time enough to cheer them when the traitors and slanderers were punished. Who cared indeed? For the moment the most important thing in the world was to secure a place of vantage for witnessing the wonderful spectacle. The President of a revolutionary tribunal, a representative of the people in the National Convention, was not often to be seen in Orange mounting the steps of the guillotine. That spectacle was reserved for the Parisians—lucky people!—who saw the heads of ci-devant kings and queens, of generals and dukes and duchesses and of countless other aristos roll into the basket. Therefore every one scrambled for a good seat. The houses all round the Place were invaded by the mob; windows and balconies were soon filled with eager faces; boys and men swarmed on the roofs, clung to the rain-pipes, the gargoyles on the Hôtel de Ville, the lamp-posts and lamp-brackets. Many were injured in the struggle. But that made no matter so long as one got a good seat. Fortunately the weather was glorious. The sun shone gaily on this scene which suggested a coming pageant.

In the centre of the Place, facing the steps of the Hôtel de Ville, the guillotine reared its gaunt arms, painted a vivid red. The officers of the *gendarmerie* had succeeded, by dint of threats, in restoring some semblance of order in the tenue of their men. They now stood at attention round the guillotine on the platform of which the executioner was busy with his grim task.

The crowd around was very still. Something oppressive, unconnected with the heat of midday sun, seemed to hang in the air. People were still pouring out of the Hôtel de Ville, though not in such compact numbers. Gradually these numbers too were thinned. Those that came out last appeared more sober, less excited than the mob that had spread itself all over the Place, shrieking and gesticulating in the manner habitual to these natives of the South.

Some of the last to come out were a group of men well known in Orange, one was the butcher from the Rue Longue, another the innkeeper of *Les Trois Abeilles*, a third kept the haberdashery shop over the bridge. Citizens Pochart and Danou were with them. They were all talking eagerly together as they came down the steps. A group of women were standing close by.

"Are they bringing the traitors?" they asked.

"Yes, Citizen Tartine," the butcher replied, "that fine patriot Rémi, one of the scavengers at the Caristie House, is close behind us, with some of his mates. They've got the traitors between them. We are to give the sign by firing this pistol when the executioner is ready."

He showed the women the pistol which he said Rémi himself had given him.

"The executioner is ready now," the women said, three of them speaking at once.

Citizens Pochart and Danou and the others then walked across the Place to the foot of the guillotine, one of them spoke a few words with the executioner. The crowd of spectators watched with feverish excitement. And presently Citizen Tartine, the butcher, raised his arm and fired a pistol in the air. A number of women shrieked. The excitement was so tense that the loud report sent the others into hysterics. Soon, however, the rumour went round that the pistol-shot was the signal that everything was ready for the spectacle and for the entrance of the chief actors in the play. After which every noise subsided.

The multitude held its breath; a thousand pairs of eyes were fixed on the wide-open portals of the Hôtel de Ville waiting for the grandiose appearance of Rémi the scavenger and his mates bearing the traitors upon their shoulders.

Up on the platform of the guillotine, the executioner was giving a last look to the pulleys. The soldiers stood at attention.

The huge crowd waited.

37

SIR PERCY HITS BACK

THE *Moniteur* does not say much about what happened afterwards. "La foule attendit avec assez de patience," is all it says, "mais personne ne vint."

The portals of the Hôtel de Ville which should have been a frame for the entrance of the principal actors in the last act of the drama, showed nothing but the yawning black emptiness beyond. The crowd waited, says the *Moniteur*, with sufficient patience. They did wait quite happily for ten minutes, agitatedly for twenty. But nobody came. Citizens Pochart and Danou, also Citizen Tartine, the butcher, and three or four others, were seen to make their way back across the Place, to run quickly up the steps of the Hôtel de Ville and subsequently disappear inside its portals. Still the crowd waited, very much as a crowd will wait in a theatre when the entr'acte is too long; some of them hilariously, others with impatient yawns, others again with tapping of feet and presently with murmurs of, "La Lan-terne! La Lan-terne!"

The next thing that happened was the reverberating clang of the portals of the Hôtel de Ville being suddenly closed. Then only did the crowd realize that they were being cheated of the spectacle. Murmurs were loud, and there were some hisses and boos and cat's calls. But on the whole they took the event with extraordinary calm. There was no rioting as indeed might have been expected. A few hot-heads tried to create a disturbance by loudly demanding that the executioner be given something to do. Madame la Guillotine should not be cheated of her dinner.

"She's hungry, give her something to eat," was the catchword these hot-heads used in order to excite the rest of the crowd. Somehow it did not work. There certainly were a few bouts of fisticuffs, one or two broken heads, the soldiers round the guillotine and those on guard at the street corners did use their bayonets with some effect, but on the whole the crowd was strangely subdued, more inclined to whisper than to shout.

For quite a little while after the portals of the Hôtel de Ville had been closed, they still waited, thinking that perhaps something more was being devised for their entertainment. But as time went on and nothing happened, they thought they might as well get home. It was dinner-time. The children were hungry, and though there was little enough in the larders these days, one had to get home and give them what there was. The whole thing had been strange. Very strange. As men and women wended their way homeward, their thoughts reverted to that titanic figure with the grimy face and huge bare chest, one sinewy arm encircling the body of the wench Fleurette *nommée* Armand, which hung limp across his massive shoulder. He was no mere mortal, that was certain. And though the Government up in Paris had abolished *le bon Dieu*, and declared that it was Citizen Robespierre who was the "Etre Suprême," something of the old superstitions imbibed at their mothers' knees, still lingered in these untutored, undisciplined minds. That the Titan with the flashing eyes and grimy face should have vanished with the traitors whom he and his satellites had seized, was but the fitting ending to his meteoric appearance. The Government might forbid belief in God and the Devil, in Heaven and in hell, but here was proof positive that the Devil did exist. He was black and he was of abnormal stature, he had a great bare chest and strong muscular arms, and—clearest proof of all—he had before the very eyes of the citizens of Orange seized upon two traitors and carried them away with him to limbo.

Nothing would take that idea out of the people's mind, and long after these horrible days of the revolution had passed away and men and women had returned to sanity, those who were present on that day in June at the trial of one Fleur Chauvelin *nommée* Armand, would recount the marvellous story of how the Devil had entered the court-house and spirited the accused away. Only a few knew the true facts of the case, and even so a great deal was left to surmise. Among those who knew was Citizen Tartine, the butcher. And this is what he told his friends when they pressed him with questions. It seems that when the crowd stampeded out of the Hôtel de Ville, he, Tartine, together with Citizens Pochart and Danou who had stepped down from the judges' bench, and three or four other notabilities of the city among whom was Motus, the chief warder of the Caristie House, put their heads together for a moment or two, wondering if something could not be done towards sending the wench Fleurette and her father by a back way to one or other of the prison-houses, with a view to bringing them up for formal trial on the morrow. They did feel, however, that given the present temper of the populace, such a move might prove dangerous to themselves. "The people will demand a victim, two victims, perhaps more," Danou said with a doubtful nod of the head. "They might vent their wrath on us."

That was sound logic, and the project was abandoned almost as soon as it was formulated.

Motus, it seems, then turned familiarly to the giant and said:

"Tiens, Rémi, is it thou?"

"Myself, citizen," the giant replied.

In response to inquiries from the others, Chief Warder Motus then explained that Rémi was a scavenger whom he himself had taken on in the Caristie House for extra work when the regular man fell sick. A splendid patriot, Motus averred. There was, therefore, not the faintest cause for suspicion.

"Come along, all of you," Pochart now said addressing Rémi and his mates. "Bring along the prisoners. The people are waiting."

"Give them time to settle down," Rémi replied with a shrug and laugh. "We are the chief comedians in this play. Do you all go and prepare everything for our entrance."

"You won't tarry?" Danou admonished.

"Not we," Rémi replied. "We're as eager as you for the spectacle, eh, citizens?" he added, turning to his mates who had the President of the Tribunal still between them.

Rémi then took a pistol out of his ragged breeches and handed it to Citizen Tartine.

"When the executioner is ready," he said, "and everything prepared for our entrance, just give us the signal by firing the pistol. We'll be with you a few minutes after that. We've yet another surprise for the spectators," he added with another laugh, "which will delight them and you."

Tartine vowed that not the slightest suspicion entered his head or that of his companions. How could one suspect a patriot vouched for by no less a person than Motus the chief warder? In the end, however, Pochart decided that two men of the *gendarmerie*, one of whom was a sergeant, who were still standing at attention below the judges' bench, should remain with Rémi and his mates and escort them when the time came, on to the Place.

After which the group of notabilities followed the rest of the crowd out into the open. When looking back upon what followed, they all agreed that some fifteen minutes must have gone from the time when they finally left the court-house and took their last look on Rémi and his mates, to that when they returned and found the place empty. They all said that even then, at first glance, no suspicion entered their minds and they stood about for a few minutes talking together, thinking that Rémi was preparing the surprise spectacle which he had promised them. Thinking too that every moment would bring the scavenger back with his mates and the prisoners. Tartine, the butcher, was the first to suspect that there might be something wrong. He crossed the floor of the room, and made his way to the private door which was at the back of the judges' bench and led to some corridors and private rooms, and also to the back of the premises of the Hôtel de Ville, and to a back door which gave on a narrow street that ran parallel with the façade.

The private door was locked, with no key to be seen. But even then, so remote was suspicion from their minds, that Tartine and the others hammered away on the door and called loudly to Rémi. The door was made of solid oak, but Pochart and Tartine were both of them powerful men. Receiving no answer to their call, they searched amidst the litter left pell-mell by the crowd upon the gradients, and found an axe and a leaded stick. Thus armed they attacked the panels of the door, whilst Danou and one of the others wisely thought of closing the portals of the Hôtel de Ville. The oak panels yielded after awhile. The door battered in, fell under the heavy blows dealt by Tartine the butcher with the axe. He and Pochart and two or three of the others striding over the debris, found themselves in a dark corridor. Some twenty paces down the corridor on the right, they came to another door. It was locked, but behind it came a vigorous sound of banging and the door shook now and again as if under heavy blows. Once more the axe was brought into play, the door was smashed in, and as it fell in with a crash it revealed the two men of the *gendarmerie*, with arms and legs securely pinioned, and their crimson caps stuffed into their mouths. One of them had succeeded in rolling along the floor, near enough to the door to kick against it with his otherwise helpless feet.

There could no longer be any doubt. The public had been hoaxed either by an impudent impostor, or by a traitor, bribed to aid the prisoners to escape. The words: "English spies," soon cropped up as did those of Amédé Colombe and Architect Caristie and a host of others. This too, no doubt, was their work. At least this was the opinion of some, whilst others, headed by Danou, shook their heads dubiously. Citizen Chauvelin was known to be the sworn enemy of those English spies—weren't they called the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel?—and it was Citizen Chauvelin and his daughter Fleur who had been so insolently spirited away.

Having hastily released the men of the *gendarmerie*, they all ran down the length of the corridor as swiftly as they could, chiefly because one of the soldiers said that this corridor led ultimately to a back entrance of the Hôtel de Ville. But the building itself was something of a maze, the passages were dark and narrow. It took them all some time to find that back door, and when at last they came upon it, they found it locked.

Once more the axe had to come into play, and time had in the meanwhile slipped by to the tune of some twenty minutes. Nor did the narrow back street reveal any of the secrets of this amazing adventure. Impostors, traitors or English spies, Rémi the scavenger and his mates had disappeared with the two prisoners and taken their secret with them. On the other side of the road there was a row of one-storied, tumble-down houses, inhabited by some of the poorest families in the city. Inquiries at each house in succession revealed but little. Nearly all the inmates had spent their morning as usual watching the trials in the Hôtel de Ville and were not yet home; but in one of the houses a sick woman had, it seems, been standing at the window when she saw four or five men come out of the building opposite. One of them, she said, was very tall and was carrying what she thought was a large bundle on his shoulder. The others were hustling a short, thin man who wore a blue coat and had on a tricolour sash round his waist. They turned sharply to their right and she soon lost sight of them. She thought nothing about the incident, one saw so many strange things these days.

In the meanwhile the crowd on the Place had begun to disperse, the first stragglers were wending their way to their homes. Pochart and Danou, holding high functions in the administration of justice, did not feel that it was incumbent upon them to go hunting for spies. That was the business of the *gendarmerie*, and they parted presently from their friends, declaring their intention of sending immediately for the Chief Commissary of Police. The others, feeling that it was not part of their duty either to run after escaped prisoners, found that they had pressing business to see to at home.

As far as Citizen Tartine, the butcher, was concerned, the incident had no further interest for him, save for the pleasure of recounting his share of the adventure to his numerous friends. A couple more traitors escaped from the clutches of justice, a few more English spies, when already the country swarmed with them, was nothing to worry one's head about.

Pochart and Danou did, on the other hand, worry their heads considerably about it all. They had a burning desire to know just what the English spies did ultimately do with their colleague Chauvelin. They hoped—oh! very ardently—that as soon as the much-vaunted Scarlet Pimpernel discovered that it was his inveterate enemy whom he had rescued from the guillotine, he would either hand him back straightway to the tender mercies of justice, or simply murder him in some convenient and out-of-the-way corner of the district. Pochart and Danou would have preferred the former alternative as being more satisfactory to their wounded vanity and their baffled spite.

Unlike Tartine, they seldom spoke of their experiences in connection with the affair. But their hopes did rise to their zenith when a week or so later President Legrange and Public Prosecutor Isnard returned from their fool's errand to Paris; there could be no doubt that even Robespierre, friend of Chauvelin though he be, would order the punishment of such a consummate liar and traitor.

38

SIR PERCY HITS BACK

An immense lassitude had held Fleurette in a kind of semi-consciousness, a dreamless sleep from which she woke at intervals, only to open her eyes for a moment, and immediately let the lids, heavy with sleep, fall over them again. It was the reaction insisted on by health and youth against the terrible nerve-strain of that awful day.

During the brief intervals while she had a certain consciousness of things about her, she found herself nestling against chéri Bibi's shoulder! and when, with half-dimmed eyes she looked up at him, and tried to smile between two yawns, she always saw his pale, grave face turned away in profile, gazing straight out before him into the dark recess of the post-chaise, in which apparently they were travelling. She called softly to him once or twice, but he never turned to look at her, only his hand, which felt cold and clammy, would gently stroke her hair.

How long all this lasted, what happened to her in the intervals of sleep, Fleurette never knew, but there came a time when the chaise rattled unpleasantly over the cobble-stones of a city, and lights darted to and fro through the darkness as the vehicle lumbered along through fitfully-lighted streets. Fleurette sat up straight, all the sleep suddenly gone out of her eyes.

"Where are we going, chéri Bibi?" she asked. "Do you know?"

"No! I do not," Bibi replied, and his voice sounded hoarse and hollow. "Would to God I did."

Fleurette had never heard him invoke *le bon Dieu* before, and she tried through the gloom to peer into his face.

"But we are out of danger now, chéri?" she asked, wide-eyed, the old terror which had caused her to lose consciousness in that awful court-house once more clutching at her heart.

"I do not know," he murmured mechanically; "would to God I did."

And then, as if recalled to himself by the half-drawn sigh of terror from Fleurette, he seized hold of her, and pressed her head against his breast.

"No! No!" he said hastily, "they cannot harm you whilst I'm here to guard you."

Just then the coach came to a halt, and a moment later the door was thrown open and a gruff voice said:

"Will you descend, citizeness?"

Fleurette, frightened, clung to Bibi. She made no attempt to move. Whereupon the gruff voice resumed:

"If you don't come willingly I shall have to send some one to fetch you."

Fleurette buried her face against Bibi's coat. His arms held her tightly. A minute, perhaps less, went by, and then—suddenly—she heard a voice—a very gentle, very timid voice this time, saying:

"Mam'zelle Fleurette! Oh, Mam'zelle Fleurette, I pray you to turn to me. It is I—Amédé."

What had happened? Was she dreaming? Or had she died of fright and gone straight up to Heaven? Certain it is that she felt a timid hand upon her shoulder, whilst Bibi's hold upon her relaxed.

"Hold up the lantern, man," the gruff voice now broke in upon the delicious silence that ensued, "and let her see that she is not dreaming."

The light of a lantern flashed across Fleurette's eyes, she opened them and turned her head, and found herself gazing on M'sieu' Amédé's pink and moist face, into his kind eyes full of anxiety and of tenderness, upon his mouth which had taught her how to kiss. Gently, slowly, she extricated herself from Bibi's embrace. Gently, slowly, she seemed to glide into Amédé's arms.

He carried her whither she knew not. All she knew was that presently she found herself snuggling in a deep, cosy arm-chair, and that Amédé was kneeling beside her, with his eyes fixed ecstatically upon her as if she were *la sainte Vierge* herself.

"Where am I, dear M'sieu' Amédé?" she asked.

"At Ste. Césaire, Mam'zelle Fleurette," he replied.

"Where is that?"

"Just outside Nîmes. Your chaise passed through the streets of Nîmes."

"I dare say," she said with a tired little sigh. "I was so sleepy; I didn't know where we were."

"We are under the protection of the bravest men that ever lived," Amédé said slowly. "They saved me from death. They have saved you, Mam'zelle Fleurette."

A shudder went through her. She closed her eyes as if to try and shut away the awful visions which his words had conjured up. But his kind, strong arms encircled her closer, and she nestled against him and once again felt comforted and safe. He told her the entire odyssey of his rescue, from the hour when the mock soldiers entered his father's shop at Laragne, until when his brave rescuers took leave of him outside the derelict cottage by the banks of the Drôme, and he, seeing the pale crescent of the moon rise above the snow-capped crest of La Lance, had solemnly bowed nine times, praying for that joy which to-day was his at last.

He had spent a few very lonely days in the cottage after that, devoured with anxiety as to the fate of his beloved. He could not eat, he could not sleep. For hours he would watch the filmy crescent of the moon, whose pale light mayhap illumined the window behind which his own Fleurette would also be watching and praying. And three days ago he received the message which he was waiting for. It appeared mysteriously early one morning outside the cottage door. A missive, with a stone put upon it to prevent its being blown away by the wind. How it got there Amédé never knew. It came from the leader of that gallant little league of Englishmen who devoted their lives to helping those in distress. In it he, Amédé, was ordered to walk as far as Crest, to the house of Citizen Marcor the farrier, where he could hire a horse. And then to hie him straightway hither to Ste. Césaire, not sleeping in any wayside inn, but rather in the fields, under shelter of hedges or forest trees, getting food for himself and his horse as best he could. The missive further directed him, on arriving at Ste. Césaire, to seek out an empty house situated in the Rue Basse, and there to wait, for of a surety within two days he would hold his beloved Fleurette in his arms. Amédé had obeyed these commands to the letter. This very morning he had arrived at Ste. Césaire and found the house in the Rue Basse. It was neither empty nor uninhabited. There was furniture in the house, and what's more there were two friends, two fine English heroes, who had been expecting Amédé, and who made him welcome when he arrived. Oh! and didn't Mam'zelle Fleurette think that these Englishmen were the finest and bravest men that ever lived? As for their chief who was known amongst them as the Scarlet Pimpernel (*le mouron rouge*, M'sieu' Amédé called it), he surely was more like one of the mythological gods rather than a mere mortal.

M'sieu' Amédé seemed very anxious to know what Mam'zelle Fleurette thought about all these marvellous adventures, but how could she tell him, how could she talk at all when every time she raised her blue eyes to him, he broke off in the midst of a most exciting narrative in order to ask her in a voice vibrating with passion: "Tu m'aimes Fleurette?"

39

SIR PERCY HITS BACK

Chauvelin, after he had seen Fleurette safely carried away in her lover's arms, sat for awhile in the dark interior of the coach, staring into the gloom, his folded hands clasped between his knees. His thoughts were in such a whirl that it almost seemed as if he were unconscious. He certainly was insentient; he neither saw, nor heard, nor felt anything save the joy of knowing that his Fleurette was safe. It was only a few minutes—fifteen perhaps—later that a pleasant laugh broke in on his riotous thoughts, and that he became aware of a tall figure sitting beside him in the coach.

"You see, my dear M. Chambertin," the voice which he dreaded most in all the world said suddenly in his ear, "I would not forego the pleasure of bidding you au revoir."

Chauvelin half turned to his enemy, the man whom he had so persistently wronged, so persistently pursued with hatred and with spite. Through the gloom he could just see the outline of the massive figure, wrapped in a dark, caped coat, and of the proud head so nobly held above the firm, somewhat stiff neck.

Did all that this man stood for in the way of heroism and selflessness, strike a chord of shame in the heart of this callous, revolutionary tyrant? Who shall say? Certain it is that for the moment Chauvelin felt awed, and sat there in the gloom, silent, motionless, staring into the black vacancy. But after a second or two his lips uttered mechanically the name that was uppermost in his mind:

"Fleurette?"

"She is under my care," Blakeney said slowly. "To-morrow at break of day she and her sweetheart will set sail for England with some of my friends. There she will be under the care of the noblest woman in the world, Lady Blakeney, who will take her revenge on you for all the wrong you did her, by lavishing the treasures of her sympathy upon your child."

"Then Fleurette will be happy?" Chauvelin murmured involuntarily.

"Happy, yes! she will soon forget."

"Then I am ready, Sir Percy."

"Ready? For what?"

"My life is at your service. My enemies are waiting for me over in Orange. You have but to send me back thither and your own vengeance will be complete."

For a second or two after that there was silence in the old post-chaise; only Chauvelin's laboured breathing broke the utter stillness of the gloom. Until suddenly a pleasant, mocking laugh struck upon his ear.

"Egad man, you are priceless," quoth Sir Percy gaily. "You must indeed credit me with a total lack of the saving grace, if you think it would amuse me to hand you over to your genial friends over in Orange."

"But I am at your mercy, sir."

"As I and my beloved wife have been once or twice, eh? Well! I am hitting back now. That's all."

"Hitting back?" Chauvelin exclaimed. "You have the power now. I admit it. I am in your hands. My life is at your command."

"La, man!" Sir Percy retorted lightly, "what should I do with your worthless life? For the moment all I want is to make that sweet child up there completely happy by telling her that you are safe and well. After that you may go to the devil for aught I care. You probably will."

"Then," Chauvelin murmured aghast, "you grant me my life, you——"

"I am sending you back safely as far as Nîmes. What happens to you after that I neither know nor care. You have tried to do me such an infinity of wrong at different times, you still hate me so cordially, you——"

He paused for a moment with firm lips tightly pressed together and slender hand clutched upon his knee.

"You are right there, Sir Percy," Chauvelin murmured between his teeth. "God knows how I still hate you, even after this. You have the power to hit back. Why the devil don't you do it?"

Whereupon Sir Percy threw back his head and his merry, infectious laugh woke the slumbering echoes of the sleepy little town.

"La, man," he said, "you're astonishing. Can't you see that this is my way of hitting back?"

THE END